

Elvis, Hound Dog and Us

by Alex Fraser

© Alex Fraser 1988

3001 Audubon Terrace, NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
202/244-3001

## Chapter Five

The dull buzz of his electric shaver filled Southgate's bathroom. He was about his morning ablutions. First the shave, then the teeth, then the shower. It was a routine that had filled the first hours of his wakefulness for years, just like his accustomed breakfast of orange juice, two scrambled eggs, a slice of toast and coffee.

He could smell the pleasant aroma of brewing coffee as it wafted upwards from the first floor kitchen. Southgate always went down and turned on his automatic coffee maker first thing.

Back upstairs now, he stood before the mirror, naked except for a large, downy towel draped around his mid-section, and moved the shaver deftly across his jaw and cheeks without giving a thought to its direction. Up and down, back and forth. He wondered how many miles the motion covered in a lifetime.

He bet a mime like Chaplin could build an entire scene around the ritual.

Southgate had awakened that morning after the film festival thinking about Chaplin again. Timeless. Farcical. True to life. All those words fit his performance.

Too bad his grave had been robbed.

Southgate paused, lifting the shaver from his face. Suddenly, his thoughts were like the ingredients of a cake batter spinning heedlessly in an electric mixer. One tumbled over another until separately they were indistinguishable. One second he was thinking of Chaplin, the next his mind was on Elvis lying peacefully in his own grave just across town.

"I'll be damned," Southgate mumbled to himself.

Up and down. Back and forth. The shaver was moving again. Southgate burrowed it into his chin, dewhiskering a little patch at a time. He liked a close shave. There were spells when he considered going back to a safety razor, replete with shaving cream and double edged blades.

Southgate began to hum. "...look sharp. ....feel sharp.....be sharp." He sang those words he could remember. They went back to his childhood in Wabasha when they filled the autumn airwaves each world series.

He thought of Elvis again, a serene reflection almost spiritual in nature, as if Elvis were encouraging him. A tranquility settled over Southgate. The shaver pushed across his cheeks. The strokes were light and even.

Slowly, the unthinkable became thinkable. Southgate found himself beginning to sort things out in his mind, to formulate a plan of action. He looked in the mirror, raised an eyebrow and saluted himself with a lopsided grin. Ponder Elvis. Mimmic Elvis. Borrow Elvis.

Southgate turned off his shaver and ran a hand over the skin around his jaw. Satisfied, he placed the razor on a shelf hung on the wall at the end of the off-white formica covered cabinet with the double emeral green wash basins. He grabbed his toothbrush and squeezed the paste out of the tube onto the bristles, then he moved the brush vigorously over his upper and lower rows of still white teeth.

Borrow Elvis. It was a million dollar idea, maybe more, and Southgate was strapped for money. Crippled without a proper cash flow, as the bankers say. Southgate had thought until the last few months that he'd done well in life, that he'd reached the plateau of his ability and style. It had been the best of all possible worlds but he wouldn't be able to afford it much longer. That millions of his fellow Americans were in the same boat was of little satisfaction.

A second consideration occurred to him. It would be the perfect way to make a monkey out of Weber, perhaps eliminate him from the governor's race. As district attorney general, he would certainly be vulnerable politically if his investigation yielded no cuplrits for trial.



Borrow Elvis. It would have to be a class act, nothing less, Southgate thought. A world class performer like Elvis deserved that. No gaudy pick and shovel operation, no siree. The undertaking would have to be worthy of the man, possess a flair people would appreciate.

It would also have to be worthy of Southgate. He had his own status to consider, too, not only in regard to style but the booty. Especially, the booty. If Southgate had learned one lesson from his study of law it was that if you're going to indulge in larceny do it on a grand, grand scale. If he failed now on that score, he'd have only himself to blame.

Southgate hung up his toothbrush and stripped the towel from his waist. Inside the shower he lingered in the steam as a stream of hot water played on the small of his back. Then he dressed quickly and ate breakfast. Already, it had been quite a morning.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Southgate turned into his parking place outside of Old Main. By then, the sun was well up and the air had begun to warm. The sky was cloudless. Southgate decided to leave the top down on his convertible.

As he eased out and closed the door, he saw LN's beautiful, long legs pumping toward him in the distance. She waved and increased her pace slightly. Where does she get all that energy, Southgate wondered. At times, and this was one, he thought she might be capable of making love all night, then running all day.

"Hey, Brax," she called out as she neared him, Elvie at her heels.

The words had a lyrical sound. She was wearing her white shorts and gray "Delta Sleeping Team" jacket again, plus the customary earphones. She slipped off the one on her left ear when she reached his side and the music came tumbling out.

"Well, since my baby left me  
I found a new place to dwell  
It's down at the end of lonely street  
It's heartbreak hotel."

It was Elvis again. Southgate listened with interest. His perspective had changed since yesterday. He was an Elvis fan now. A new bond existed between them. LN twisted a small wheel on her portable cassette player and the tune faded away.

"I looked for you when I left home," Southgate said. "Thought you might want a ride."

"Drove myself to the library early. I like to work some before jogging." LN glanced at Southgate's briefcase. "TCBing I see."

"What?"

"TCB. Stands for take or taking care of business depending upon how you use it. It was an expression of Elvis' when he and his boys had work to do."

"Very appropriate," Southgate replied. A thin smile crossed his lips.

"Elvis gave them all sunglasses with TCB in capital letters on the side of the earpieces," LN continued. "There's a pair in the memorabilia at the library. I'll show them to you sometime."

"I'd like to see them."

LN looked at Southgate closely. "Well, that's a switch."

Southgate grinned. "Yea-a-a-a-h."

LN didn't pursue the subject. "Still grading exams?" she asked.

"Almost through."

"In time for lunch?"

Southgate hesitated. "I'm not sure. I might work right on through until I finish."

"My God," LN exclaimed, laughing. "Your whole living pattern is changing. Skipping lunch. An interest in Elvis." She tossed back her head. "Unheard of."

An awkward silence followed. A breeze came softly from the southwest, rustling LN's hair.

"About lunch," Southgate said finally. "I think I'll skip it. But I appreciate the invitation."

"Suit yourself."

"I'd like to get away by mid-afternoon. Need to run an errand."

"I'll see you later then. Give me a call when you get home."

"Will do," Southgate promised.

LN smiled and tuned up the volume again on her stereo cassette.

"Tomorrow will be too late  
It's now or never, my love won't wait."

She slipped the earphone back on over her left ear and jogged away, her head swaying in time to the music.

As soon as he was inside of his office, Southgate reached for the yellow paged classified telephone directory. He thumbed through it until he found the section for Memphis amusements and historical sites. His finger slid quickly down the column to Graceland, the name of Elvis Presley's longtime home. He dialed and waited.

"Hello," he said after a few seconds. "Is Graceland open to the public?"

"From nine to four daily, except on Monday," a soft feminine voice replied. "The gravesite only."

"Thank you," Southgate said. As an afterthought he asked, "Is there an admission charge?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, thank you again."

"You're quite welcome."

Southgate put down the receiver and glanced at his watch. He had approximately four hours of work ahead of him on the exam papers. The drive out to Elvis' estate would add another thirty to forty minutes. If everything went as scheduled he should be at Graceland around two-thirty. Southgate took the first exam on the pile and went to work.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Six

As the crow flies, The Delta college campus is about eight miles from Graceland. In between them is a low rolling metropolitan area typical of American cities everywhere. Some of it's old, some of it new, some of it residential, some if it industry. Some parts are pretty, others are ugly.

They're all hapless victims of the ever changing ideas and moods of a city's residents.

The college is in east Memphis about seven miles from the Mississippi river. As Memphis grew it pushed east more than other directions and even today this is the most affluent section of the city. The seventy acre campus, shaded by maples and sycamores, sits pretty much in the middle of this wealth on a straight line due east of downtown.

Once the downtown was vibrant with activity and there are signs it will be again. Its office skyscrapers jutting heavenward on the Chickasaw bluffs above the big river's muddy waters are still the marker for all other Memphis locations sprawling out below them.

Graceland is six miles or so south and a little east of downtown.

Southgate had never visited the famed estate although LN had coaxed him to go along with her from time to time. He'd always refused. He'd never even driven by the entrance on U.S. 51 as the highway heads south into Mississippi towards Batesville.

Now, he was anxious to get started. He scrawled a B+ on the top of the first page of the blue book on the desk before him and closed its cover. The last mid-semester exam was graded. There would be no more tests for him to mark until finals two months away. Southgate always graded the big tests at mid-term and finals himself. His student assistants handled the pop quizzes in-between.

A few students considered Southgate a tough grader, but as college professors go, he was about average. He was fair and over the years he seldom, if ever, actually looked at the name on the exam. He graded it and tossed it onto a pile for an assistant to sort out and record.

That isn't to say, he didn't have favorite pupils from time to time. But this attraction was based almost always on classroom participation and within a few years after graduation he almost always lost track of them as new classes came forward.

One exception was John Parron, bright and gregarious, who'd become an assistant district attorney general in Shelby county. For the last year, the young graduate had expressed misgivings to Southgate about Weber. He had no proof of wrongdoing, Parron said, but there was a pattern of going easy on gamblers that bothered him. He told Southgate that

... evidence was often destroyed and charges reduced. There were office rumors that Weber talked on occasion by phone with Memphis gangland figures. It was Parron who'd told Southgate that it smacked of payoffs. Everyone knew that Weber lived in a style well beyond his salary, but he'd had a lucrative private law practice before becoming Shelby county's attorney general and his wife, of course, had money.



The sky was still cloudless when Southgate reached his convertible. In fact, since the top had been down, he found the black leather seat rather warm from the sunshine as he slid in behind the steering wheel. It was one-thirty. It had taken him four hours on the nose to finishing grading the tests.

As Southgate eased out of the parking area, he spotted the stocky body of Togo Bridger, head of the geology department at Delta, walking along the sidewalk half a block away.

"Where you headed?" Southgate called out when he was even with Bridger.

The geologist turned his head back over his left shoulder. "Well. Hi, Brax," he shouted. "I'm on my way to the gym for a swim."

Bridger had the physique of a swimmer. He was barrel chested and strength was discernable in his back and shoulders. He wasn't as tall and handsome as his friend, but his fair hair framed a strong face softened by a humorous mouth and eyes which seems to miss nothing. His brows always seemed arched in vague surprise.

Southgate pulled along the curb and stopped. "Jump in," he said, opening the door. "The gym's right on my way. I'll give you a lift."

Southgate and Bridger were old and close associates. They'd started teaching the same year at Delta. Bridger was in his mid-forties now and divorced, with a son and two daughters, all of whom lived with their mother in Amarillo in the Texas panhandle.

Bridger was from Texas, where he'd worked as a roustabout in the oil fields to earn money for college. He knew geology from both books and practical experience. In his field, he was an expert.

"Finished grading?" Bridger asked as the car pulled back into the street.

"The last one just a few minutes ago," Southgate laughed.

"It's a wonderful feeling."

"It sure is," agreed Bridger.

"How are things otherwise?" asked Southgate.

Bridger sighed. "It's tough, Brax, with this inflation in double digits. I can barely make it with the monthly child support payments and all. I'm practically running two households."

"Can't Sarah help out?"

"Oh, occasionally. Sometimes I think the only solution is to hold up a bank."

"You do?" Southgate questioned, his eyes turned towards his companion.

"Surprised?"

"Well, I think a lot of us feel that way."

"Really?"

Both men laughed. "Here's the gym," Southgate said, pulling up to the curb again. Bridger hopped out. "See you later," he said.

Southgate waved. "Have a good swim," he yelled, driving away.

Once away from the campus, Southgate zig-zagged through several miles of side streets until he reached Getwell boulevard. Then, he drove straight south to Winchester road, turned west and continued past Memphis International airport to U. S. 51. As he moved south again through the intersection, he saw the white on green road sign which designated the highway as Elvis Presley boulevard.

Southgate glanced at his wrist watch. The time was two-fifteen. Traffic was heavier now. He eased into the far right lane of the wide thoroughfare in anticipation of soon reaching Graceland. The one thing he knew about the area was that the Mississippi state line was only a few miles south of Winchester road. Graceland, nestled just inside the Memphis corporate limits, would be coming up fast.

Southgate saw the small crowd of visitors clustered around the Music Gate first, then the stone fence stretching along the road on his left. At the same time, to his right, running approximately the same length as the fence, he took in a line of shops with a towering sign in front of them which read "Graceland Center."

Southgate pulled into the big parking lot in front of the stores and eased into a space with a full view of the estate. Beyond the fence, a well kept lawn, its grass just beginning to turn green again, stretched out before him. The ground rose gently and he could easily see a blacktop drive as it wound through handsome towering oaks on its way to the mansion atop the small hill. The slanting rays of the sun, behind him now, played on the few dried up brown leaves that still clung to the tree branches from last summer.

A subdued feeling overcame Southgate. Despite the noise of the traffic and the blare of Elvis records from the shops, there really was beauty here. A quiet reverence, mixed with a suspended moment of carefree happiness, hung in the air. It was as if a cocoon had been dropped over that little piece of earth to hold the era of Elvis Presley captive forever.

Southgate stirred. He left the car and walked to the traffic signal opposite the Music Gate, where he waited until the light changed to cross. One half of the gate, with its two metal images of a man playing a guitar surrounded by music notes, was open. Along with other visitors, Southgate slipped inside and walked up the drive.

After a short distance, the drive split. One section circled up in front of the imposing, two story Georgian mansion, which Southgate could see clearly now. It was built of ocher Tennessee limestone and wood. He counted six white pillars on the portico. Green shutters decorated the windows.

The other leg of the drive led to the burial site. Southgate moved along, caught up in the slow steady stream of people moving to and from the grave. He was amazed there were so many. They were quiet, talking in hushed tones. At times, the only sound he heard was the shuffle of shoes on the blacktop.

He was just a few yards from the grave now, which was set in a terraced garden beside those of the singer's mother and father and grandmother. Southgate began to make mental notes of the surroundings. Over there was a dogwood tree. A few steps up from the garden toward the mansion was a kidney shaped swimming pool, its still water a glassy blue-green.

It must have been the same when Elvis lived, Southgate thought. He knew little about the singer but he recalled that LN had told him once that Elvis couldn't swim.

Southgate walked up into the garden, where he saw four large, flat bronze and marble grave markers. Elvis was between his mother and grandmother. The fourth grave was his father's. All were in front of a wishing well surrounded by a wrought iron fence, in the center of the garden. Six fountains bubbled up out of the water. Around the south side of the garden was an open Grecian style temple of eight corinthian columns. Its curving back wall held four stained glass windows.

Almost before he realized it, Southgate had noted that Elvis' grave was directly in line with the third window. For an instant, he felt self-conscious and awkward. He glanced around. Next to him, a woman smiled.

"Can you feel the vibes?" she asked. She was Southgate's age, still pretty, a brunette with short hair and a wide, generous mouth. "It's like he's still alive, somehow."

"It's the legend," Southgate answered. "Legends don't die, ever. Men die. But the legends they create become immortal." Southgate blanched. He couldn't imagine he'd spoken those words. But, somehow, he'd blurted them out as if, like the woman, he, too, was a true believer.

She looked at him closely. "Say, that's beautiful," she said. She was suddenly excited. "Do you come here often? I mean, you sound as if you know a lot about him."

"Not really. I've never been here before."

"Me either. But it's just like I imagined. Ah..." she paused, then drew a deep breath.

"Vital," Southgate interjected. "Maybe that's the word you want. It's quiet, but there's a vitality here with the people walking about, talking softly. There's a real presence."

"Say, are you a writer?" she asked. "Or a teacher?"

Southgate smiled amicably. "Just a fan," he said.

"Would you take my picture in front of the marker?" she asked.

"Sure."

The woman lifted the strap over her head and handed the camera to Southgate. He checked the focus, then squinted through the viewfinder. There was a click when he pushed down on the button. The woman walked forward and took back the camera.

"Gee, thanks. You're really nice." She hesitated. "Well, goodbye now," she said finally, turning away. Southgate watched her walk over to the wishing pool. She stood silently by the iron fence for a moment, then tossed in a coin.

The water shimmered. Southgate wondered what direction the underground pipes came from. He thought over his comment about the legend again. He understood why he'd said it. It was the legend that would make his scheme viable. It was the legend that would give it substance.

The sun had dropped further down toward the western horizon now. The days were longer as spring moved northward up the great river valley but darkness still came early and would for another month. Southgate took one last look around preparatory to leaving. He took notice of the informality that prevailed. There were no stern security guards to keep people moving, nor apparently were any necessary. These visitors to the mecca of rock n' roll took their pilgrimage seriously. Obviously, they'd come to pay their last respects to a man they were extremely proud of.

Southgate glanced again, almost idly, at Elvis' marker. He chuckled to himself. There, at the foot of the grave, was the symbol "TCB."

As he walked back down the drive, Southgate did pass a guardhouse about fifteen yards from the garden. The officer inside was relaxed and friendly and absorbed in a sideline of selling Presley family albums. The same informality existed at the guardhouse at the Music Gate. One of the men, dressed in civilian clothes, posed for photographs with visitors.



"I bet you get tired of this," said the woman standing next to him waiting for her friend to click the camera. He wasn't a young man, but his eyes sparkled. He put his arm around the woman and gave her a hug.

"Some men are just born lucky," he said, laughing.

Southgate studied him closely. The man looked vaguely familiar. Southgate turned to a woman standing beside him who was also watching the photo taking session.

"Who is that, do you know?" Southgate asked.

"Why, that Elvis' uncle, Vester," the woman responded.

"Yes, I see the resemblance now," Southgate said. The face was slightly longer and narrower. There were wrinkles but he did have Presley features. No doubt about it, he's for real, Southgate concluded.

Across the highway in the parking lot again, Southgate ambled toward his car, then decided to get a cup of coffee. He walked on toward the Hickory Pit, a restaurant at the south end of the shopping center that proclaimed on a side wall that it was open twenty-four hours a day to serve the best smoked ribs in the world. Southgate hoped only that the coffee was good.

The restaurant was empty except for a lone couple seated at a table near the window overlooking Graceland. As he sat down nearby, Southgate realized that they were speaking German. The waitress was a pale blonde woman on the far side of thirty. Southgate noticed her ears were pierced, but she wore no earrings. She had on heavy eye make-up consisting of black lashes and light pink lids. She approached his table the instant Southgate sat down.

"Just coffee, please," he said.

She moved away to the coffee-maker and returned with the glass carafe. A cup and saucer were already on the table. Steam rose from the coffee as she poured.

"Looks good," said Southgate. "Nice and hot."

"The best brewed," the waitress replied. A smile wavered on her face. "Sure you wouldn't care for something else? Our apple pie is fresh."

Southgate shook his head. The couple paid and departed. Southgate noted a black light picture of Elvis on the wall behind the cash register. A squat juke box stood to one side.

"I overheard them speak German," Southgate said. He was the only customer now.

"People still come from all over," she said. "Those two were from a tour group. But it's not like it was when Elvis was alive. We used to be busy twenty four hours a day then." She pointed to the juke box. "It has only Elvis' records. Sixty songs. People would come in here to play them and wait, hoping for a chance to see him. You can see the drive from here. They'd watch for him to leave or come home."

"There were quite a few over there today," Southgate remarked, pointing toward Graceland.

"Oh, this was a slow day," she told him. "Only a few thousand, I'd say. Usually, there are twice that many. Week-ends are still really busy. Saturday is a big day. But now people go up to see the grave, then leave. They don't hang around like they used to when they had a chance of seeing him. The Music Gate always used to be packed with fans milling around."

"Some are over there now," Southgate said, nodding toward the street.

"Yeah, but only a handful." She sighed, a wistful look in her blue eyes. "It still grabs me, but not like the old days."

"He built quite a life for himself for a country boy," Southgate said.

"If I'd known exactly what he had, I'd have bottled it and made a million dollars," the waitress said. Her smile was wide and gentle. "But I don't think it was just one thing. It was everything," she continued after a moment's pause. "Heck, a lot of singers had looks and a good voice. Elvis had an electricity that set him apart from the others."

Southgate nodded and sipped his coffee. The waitress gazed out the restaurant's big glass windows at Graceland. She still held the coffee pot in one hand, seemingly unconscious of its weight. Perfume clung to her uniform and mixed with the aroma of the coffee.

"So, you take this electicity, combine it with a southern accent, a pair of sideburns, a smile as devastating as the atom bomb and throw in musical talent," she said. "You pour on style, magnetism and wild excitment. Add sweetness and love, his fans love of him and his love for them, and you have Elvis."

"Yeah, you may be right," Southgate said casually.

The waitress laughed. "You don't seem very enthused," she said. She tossed her head petulantly. "Maybe you could use a bottle of my stuff."

It was Southgate's turn to laugh. "You may be right," he said again. He shoved his cup forward. "Meantime, I'll have another cup of coffee."

"Where you from?" she asked as she poured.

"Right around here. Memphis."

"You don't talk like you're from the South."

"Minnesota originally. I just followed the river down here."

Southgate drained his cup. "How much do I owe you?"

"Fifty cents plus two cents tax."

Southgate handed her a dollar. "Keep the change. You make a good cup of coffee."

"Well, thanks, mister," she said. "Come back, now."

For a man in financial purgatory, Southgate had been very generous. At the door, he looked back to see the waitress put the money in the juke box. Shortly, Elvis began to sing.

Outside, Southgate studied the other shops. One, behind the restaurant, was empty. He peered inside and saw that it had been a laundermat. The locations of the machines were clearly outlined on the faded tile floor and the cut off pipes stuck out of the walls.

Southgate walked back toward his car, noticing the other shops as he went. There was a boutique, several souvenir stores, a T-Shirt World, a gold and silver buyer which also housed a glass blower, a camera shop, a shoe store, a florist, a record store, a western hats and indian jewelry outlet, sight seeing tours and an ice cream parlor. All of them featured Elvis Presley items from swizzle sticks to copies of his last will and testament.

Across the highway, Southgate saw that the Music Gate was closed. He looked at his wrist watch. The time was four twenty-five. The parking lot was empty except for Southgate's convertible and a dozen other cars. Three cars were parked in the turnoff along the wall across the road. A half a dozen people were still in front of the gate.

The traffic was heavy now and moving steadily, most of it southbound away from the city. Southgate climbed in his car, then sat there for a few minutes while he recapped the afternoon. He knew something about Graceland now. Perhaps his knowledge was still superficial but he had begun. He wasn't sure yet of his next step. In time, he would determine his options then decide on a final plan.

He knew he'd have to return to Graceland again, perhaps after dark some night. He could have dinner at the Hickory Pit, see if the ribs were as delicious as the sign claimed. Of course, he didn't want to become too familiar around the place unless that eventually fit his purpose.

Southgate coughed, From habit he placed his hand over his mouth. Up on the hill behind the shopping center where a line of homes lined the crest, he heard a dog bark, powerfully, excitedly. Then, it was quiet again except for the traffic.

The air had become chilly. Southgate turned a knob on his dashboard. There was the purr of a small motor as the top slowly moved skyward from behind the back seat and unfolded over him. He pulled the front down and fastened the clamps on either side.

In a moment, he thought, he would go.

Looking across at Graceland again, he concluded it looked very secure. He took a deep breath. Both planning and execution would have to be thorough if he was to succeed. This morning he'd thought of everything in terms of a class act. Now, he thought of it in terms of the work involved.

Still, he felt an exhilaration about the day. He knew things weren't as simple as when the idea had first flashed through his mind. But he didn't feel overwhelmed. Exhilarated was the feeling. He was sure of it. Southgate laughed to himself. Why not borrow three letters from Elvis. They would sum up his feelings. TCB. Taking care of business. That's what he was doing.

Southgate stepped on the starter. The motor sputtered, then roared to life. He pulled over to the highway and watched for a break in the traffic. Down the road, he saw a light turn red. Slowly, the number of cars eased. Southgate moved through the opening, turned a sharp left and headed for home.

\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*



## Chapter Seven

LN's office in the basement on the northside of Delta's library needless to say was not pretentious. It had half windows which let in an oyster gray light through iron grates over sunken wells. On cloudy days it was dark. But she kept it clean and tidy and a number of modernist paintings by Gershon Wingo did add splashes of bright colors to the walls which were a light green. A matching push button telephone was on the desk.

This subterranean sanctuary of hers had two rooms, one of which was used by Jenny Plato, a part-time assistant who catalogued Elvis memorabilia as it was collected. Rounding up the mementoes was a slow process. Many of them were still controlled by the singer's estate and negotiations were complicated by the absence of a library building in which to house the material.

LN was well aware of the dilemma and was determined to raise the money quickly so ground could be broken for the structure later in the year. She felt that once construction was begun many of her problems would disappear for there would be tangible proof of Delta's good faith.

To her, the college was the ideal location for a library and center for the study of Elvis and his contribution to music just as Harvard was the logical location for the John F. Kennedy School for International Studies. Memphis, to her, reflected the life and times of Elvis in the same way Boston does for Kennedy.

As LN says, each of them, in his own definitive way, had an impact on his times. The two men were LN's favorite heroes, but Elvis was more her own age and she felt closer to him for that reason. Her dream was the library and she was determined to see it successfully completed. Money, or more precisely a lack of it, was the obstacle.

Enough had been collected to complete the architectural plans and to pay LN's salary. But so far that one big donation which would make Delta's and LN's dream come true had proven illusive even though land had been set aside on the campus for the structure.

The telephone's ring roused LN from her reverie. "Hello, Elvis Presley library," she said. Her voice was a rasping purr.

"Ms. Gladfelter?"

"This is she."

"Hi. This is Margaret Jean Tracy. Mr. Axelbank's personal secretary." Her voice was soft and southern. She placed a subtle emphasis on the word personal.

"Well, how are you?"

"I'm just fine, thanks. I'm calling to make an appointment for Mr. Axelbank to visit you." She paused for a moment. "He's anxious to see you again."

"And I'm anxious to see him again," LN responded, a lyrical tone in her voice. "When would he like to come out?"

"He's thinking of tomorrow or early next week. I'd say after looking at his schedule that next week would be better for you. He'd have more time then. He'd be rushed tomorrow."

"Can he come for lunch?"

"I think he'd like that."

"I was thinking of the faculty dining room in the union. A nice academic atmosphere."

"It isn't a cafeteria is it?" Margaret Jean asked, a note of caution entering her voice. "He dislikes cafeterias."

"Oh, no. It's very nice."

"I had to ask." Her voice dropped. "I wanted to warn you. I know how important this visit is to you."

"I do want it to be pleasant," LN said.

Margaret Jean laughed. She lowered her voice to a whisper.

"Mr. Axelbank is pretty tight with a dollar but he does like to live well."

"I suspected that the other day," LN answered. "What is his background? With that neatly trimmed beard and smooth, well formed bald head, there's a touch of aristocracy about him."

Margaret Jean giggled. "Sue Ann and I call him Mr. Upside Down Face." She paused, then continued. "But you're right. He's from a respected, old family in the horse country around Paris, Kentucky. Their studs have sired some well known thorough-breds. He has three brothers, all bankers. They consider him the black sheep. Isn't that funny. He wealthier than all of them put together."

"Well, it's not as if he played piano in a whore house," LN laughed. "But some families are very strict on what's respectable." Obviously, he's strayed."

"He has a nice singing voice," Margaret Jean put in. "Not good enough for Broadway or Las Vegas but swell for little theater groups. You know the type. He liked radio. His first job was as a page for NBC in New York City. I think that's where his distaste for cafeterias began."

"Did he make it at all in radio?" LN asked.

"He never did. So he became an agent and promoter, gouging and scrambling." Margaret Jean stopped. But LN was silent so she continued,

"He doesn't talk about it but he has a degree in business administration from Princeton."

LN perked up. "Why, he's not unschooled then. He's no stranger to a college campus. Why, he's what they call quality down here."

"He knows his way around," said Margaret Jean. Her voice became a whisper again. "But he can be ornery."

"You blow hot and cold about him," LN said.

Margaret Jean smiled. "I guess so," she said.

LN became serious again. "Tell me, Margaret Jean, is he really interested in Delta's library?"

Margaret Jean hesitated. "Well, he's interested in the idea," she said slowly. "He sees it as a boon to his fan club empire. He wants to keep that going full steam. But as I said, he's tight. You know the expression, tight as the paper on the wall. That's Mr. Axelbank. But he thinks you're nice. In fact, he's quite taken with you."

"Will that help me?"

"Depends," said Margaret Jean laughing. "He doesn't believe Southern ladies are only for marrying. With him, it's always what price virtue."

LN chortled. "Am I worth two million dollars to him?"

"Honey, I've never known anyone to be yet." Margaret Jean paused, then changed the subject. "Do you really have original Elvis memorabilia?" she asked.

"We certainly do."

"I'd like to see it. May I come out sometime? I couldn't come with Mr. Axelbank, of course."

"You come out anytime you like," LN told her. "Just give me a call to make sure I'm here."

"That's real sweet of you. Now, How about Mr. Axelbank's visit?"

"Say, noon next Tuesday. How does that sound?"

"I'll put it on his calendar."

"Me too, then. I'll meet him in my office. That's in the present library." They fell silent. Finally, LN picked up the conversation again. "Now don't forget. When you want to come out, give me a call."

"You'll hear from me," Margaret Jean replied. "Bye now."

"Bye." LN placed the receiver down in its cradle. Forewarned, is forearmed, she thought as she wrote the meeting down on her desk calendar. She put a red circle around it for emphasis. She hoped it would be a red letter day.

But after talking to Margaret Jean, she was realistic. Axelbank was going to be a hard sell.

Margaret Jean hung up her phone and straightened the skirt of her flowered foulard dress. This was the day she stayed late. She wished Axelbank would buzz her. She wanted to be on her way.

Margaret Jean was attractive with her red hair and peach like skin. And she was put together in a very pleasant way. She was 27. Axelbank had hired her right out of high school, where she'd finished tops in her secretarial course typing 120 words a minute and with short hand which was admirable.

Everyone predicted she'd have no trouble finding a job, which had been true. She'd gotten a number of offers. The Second Tennessee bank wanted her for its executive typing pool and promised her quick advancement. She'd get the first opening, they said, and emphasized that the chairman's personal secretary of many years was going to retire in six months. A young computer firm, dealing in software, offered to train her as a programmer and one of the South's oldest law firms, Jackson, Moncure, Crump & Lee, after one interview wanted to train her as a legal secretary.

None of them had a chance. She was an avid Elvis Presley fan and when Axelbank made her an offer, she accepted on the spot. The pay was equal to the others and here was the added excitement of a touch of show business. There was even a chance of meeting The King himself. Axelbank hadn't said that exactly but he'd hinted at it and that was enough.

Even if she never met Elvis, she still figured the job would be more exciting than the executive suite of a bank or a law office, no matter how prestigious the firm. Lawyers always turned things upside down anyway. The computer firm had interested her but only until Axelbank entered the picture.

Her office at the fan club headquarters was as large as the junior partner's at the law firm. It had a beautiful view in the late afternoon, especially during the short days of winter, when she watched the lights of Memphis flicker on like a neon fairyland from the 19th floor. It was a dynamic view of which she never tired.

Axelbank's own office was in the southwest corner and had an unimpeded vista across the river into Arkansas. When the clouds were high and the air thin, the eye could see for miles across the plain moving west from the river and south beyond Graceland into Mississippi.



After Elvis died, the job became even more meaningful. It kept the past alive. She'd worried at first that everything would fade away. But she'd underestimated Axelbank's great talent as an entrepreneur. There'd been no tears in his eyes when Elvis cashed in his chips. It could be bigger than ever, he told her, and he'd been right. At first, Margaret Jean had been surprised but slowly she began to realize the genius Axelbank had as a promoter.

He'd moved fast and had an inside track since he knew the family. Margaret Jean was continually impressed by the wide circle of Axelbank's acquaintances, not only in the music and record industries, but in politics.

She rose and walked to the window. She looked down at the river winding its way south aware, because Axelbank had explained it to her, of its musical heritage. Almost below her was Beale street, where the blues had been born. Farther south, New Orleans was the home of jazz and then, there in Memphis again, rock 'n roll, a sound with still another emotion, had developed. All had come from this diverse river valley.

Margaret Jean wondered what the inspiration had been. Perhaps the endless sounds of the water rolling past on hot, humid summer nights when people couldn't sleep. The hold of the sultry nights and the river, with its power and special sounds, must have contributed to the restless feelings that gave birth to music which had spread from the valley below around the world, she thought.

Margaret Jean turned away from the window and opened the door to Axelbank's office. He was sitting in his high backed, leather judge's chair staring at the ceiling.

"Come in, my dear," he said.

Margaret Jean walked forward, exuding overtones of sexuality. In the years she'd been with Axelbank, she'd matured from the fresh, unsoiled beauty of a schoolgirl to the full flower of an awakened woman.

"You've kept me waiting," he chuckled.

"You've said you like the moments of anticipation," she responded. The slight trace of a teasing smile showed in her eyes.

"You remember well. The minutes of waiting are times of painful pleasure."

Margaret Jean pondered the phrase painful pleasure for a few seconds. "You're using an oxymoron again," she said.

Axelbank wondered where she'd picked up that word. She continually amused him. The truth of the matter was that Margaret Jean had studied Axelbank's tactics and learned the habits of his own operation. She'd become as shrewd as he was. What she wasn't yet sure of, she suspected. Someday, if necessary, she'd be able to nail him to the wall.

Margaret Jean kicked off her high heeled shoes and placed them neatly side by side under the coffee table in the far corner of Axelbank's office. Then she walked slowly towards him. Axelbank pushed his chair away from his desk and turned until he faced the direction of her approach. At first, two years earlier, she'd been shy. Now, she did everything in a blissful mixture of business and pleasure while Axelbank remained immobile and expectant.

From the first, she'd liked the feel. It had been better than she anticipated. She'd discovered that she was very sensitive and responsive. Now, that he let her work her will, she was content.

When she was over him, she reached down and felt him through his pants.

"Play with me," he directed, his eyes rolling back in their sockets. His head rested on the chair. He reached up and unbuttoned his collar, then loosened his tie.

"Take it off if you like," she said. "I'll wait."

He quickly pulled the tie through the loop of its knot and tossed it on the desk.

"Ready?" she asked.

Axelbank nodded. Margaret Jean unzipped his fly and massaged him gently. As her fingers moved up and down, he became larger and harder. She enjoyed the feel. At first, she'd disliked touching him. She wanted only the pleasure it provided her. She never looked. Then, as she mastered the mechanics she became curious as to the appearance of a male copulating organ. Initially, her glances were cursory. But, as she learned to feel the shape, she became less intimidated and bolder.

From the beginning, it was clinical. Margaret Jean did not feel a strong emotional attachment to Axelbank. She looked upon him as a baseball player would spring training. The sessions were just warm-ups for the real season. When the right man came along, Margaret Jean wanted to be ready to treat him right. There was to be no rookie status for her.

Then, there was a new development even more intriguing than the learning experience. When Margaret Jean had first summoned the courage to look at Axelbank as she stroked him, he'd been to her eyes normal and unblemished, both well endowed and flesh unmarred. Then, Axelbank had gone off to Europe to visit the fan clubs there. Margaret Jean had handled the itinerary, which had stops in London, Paris, Munich, Zurich, Copenhagen and Stockholm. He was gone a month.

Upon his return, he seemed reluctant to resume their lovemaking. Finally, Margaret Jean took the initiative. It was a strange situation. When she'd enter his office, the lamp lights would be low and Axelbank would be anxious to finish, like a man with something to hide. His trip had been in the fall. When he returned, darkness came early as the days grew shorter. It wasn't until the following spring that the days became long enough again to do away with the lamplight in the late afternoon.

It was then, in the sun's rays of a late May afternoon, that she'd noticed a purple mark on the left side of his foreskin. As she'd stroked, she thought about the mark. She was sure it was new, that it hadn't been there before his European trip. As he hardened, the mark enlarged until she was sure it was a row of tattooed numbers and letters. She saw a three and a one clearly but the others were still blurred. She thought there were about a dozen in all.

How curious, she'd thought, but she'd said nothing, pretending as if everything were normal. She'd looked up to find Axelbank watching her. She'd smiled and blown him a kiss. After that, the sessions were back to their old uninhibited selves. Axelbank reflected pure enjoyment again. Margaret Jean noticed the mark from time to time, always glancing at it for a few seconds with renewed curiosity. She was sure one night, when Axelbank was especially firm, that there was a six and a five in the row. She was no expert on tattoos but this must have been first class work to be so minute. She smiled to herself wondering whether he'd been hard or soft during the work.

As she fiddled with him now, fine tuning him like the strings of a Stradivarius violin, the same thought reoccurred to her and she suppressed a giggle. Someday soon she must solve this mystery, she said to herself. Axelbank, after all, wasn't getting any younger.

He was firm now. She stopped stroking and quickly unbuttoned his belt and slipped his pants lower. Delicately, she straddled him, her knees pressed against the soft leather seat, her thighs nestled between him and the chair's arms. With slow, tantalizing moves, she placed him inside of her and slid down until she rested on his legs. She rubbed against him, her eyes glazed, her mind in suspension. This was the feeling she liked. She'd forgotten Axelbank now, he was on his own.

Suddenly, she arched her back. Axelbank stirred and pushed upward. He placed his big hands on her hips and pressed down on him as he reached his climax. She squirmed

"Mr. Axelbank," she gasped. "You are sooooo good at this."

Her body shook in a series of convulsions. For a few seconds, she sat on him, still looking into his face, a half smile on her moist lips. Finally, she straightened up, stepped backwards away from him and smoothed her dress.

"Good night, Mr. Axelbank," she said picking up her shoes. A wide smile crossed her face. She raised her hand and wiggled her fingers at him.

"See you in the morning."

Axelbank watched her go. "She's one good lookin' Mamma," he murmured to himself. There was contentment in his voice. He listened while she closed the outer office door softly, then he hitched up his pants.

A short time later he followed her down the elevator and slid onto the back seat of his limousine for the ride home.

\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*

## Chapter Eight

Togo Bridger was surprised to see Southgate's townhouse was dark. He hesitated a moment on the sidewalk, then walked three doors farther down the street where he saw the lights were on in LN's living room. The front door was open and he could see the entrance hall clearly through the glass pane in the storm door. In a few more days, he thought, it will be warm enough to replace the glass with a screen.

Bridger opened the storm door a crack. "Anyone home?" he called.

"I'm down here in the den," LN answered. "Come on in."

Bridger walked through the hall and stepped down the three steps into the den.

"Hi," LN said. "You look upside down."

"My God, LN, what are you doing?" Bridger asked.

LN had on shoes that were fastened to the wall and she was hanging downward, her head near the floor.



"Don't be frightened, Togo. These are only gravity exercises. They're supposed to make me think better, clear my head. What can I do for you?"

"Do you know where Brax is?"

"Isn't he home? He usually is at this time of the evening."

"No. When I saw him this afternoon, he said he had an errand to run. But that was hours ago."

"Wait here, if you like. There's coke and beer in the refrigerator. There's some scotch and bourbon in the cupboard if you'd like a drink."

"Mind if I have a little bourbon and branch water?"

"Please, be my guest."

"How about you?"

"I've never tried drinking standing practically on my head, Togo. Think I could?"

"How's your plumbing at that end?" he asked, grinning like a gargoyle.

"My vocal pipes are fine. Can't you tell?" After a few seconds she added, "I'll have a scotch on the rocks."

"Check." Bridger went up into the kitchen and mixed the drinks. When he returned, LN was on her feet right side up. Togo handed the scotch to her.

"Cheers," she said taking a sip from the glass. Bridger took a swallow from his own glass.

"What was Brax's errand?" LN asked.

"He didn't say."

"Well, I'm surprised he's not home," LN said.

"Seems like a pretty long errand."

"I don't think he wants us to know what he's doing," LN said.

She sipped her scotch again.

"Maybe he's making some extra money," Bridger said.

"Doing what?" LN asked.

"I don't know."

"Maybe he went downtown," LN said. "He's on a committee for the bar association. Maybe he's doing some work in connection with that. I really don't think it's anything to get excited about, Togo."

"I suppose not." Bridger took another swallow of his drink. "This hits the spot. Puts me in the mood for a good dinner."

"Would you like to stay? I'm going to fry some chicken. I've plenty for both of us."

"Wouldn't you rather go out?"

"Oh, Togo, I'd have to change clothes. Let's stay here. Like a refill?"

"I'll take care of the drinks if you want to begin dinner."

"Let me get started," LN said. "Just keep my drink in here. I'll be back in a couple of minutes."

Bridger heard the clash of pans from the kitchen, then the opening and closing of the refrigerator door. Soon there was the sizzle and strong, pleasant aroma of chicken frying. Bridger picked up LN's drink and took it into the kitchen.

"I thought you might like this," he said. "You seem busy here. I decided you wouldn't have time to come back into the living room."

"You're probably right," LN said. "Chicken doesn't fry itself very well." She took the head of lettuce from the counter and began making a salad.

"Let me do that," Togo said. "Salads don't make themselves very well either."

LN laughed. "I didn't know you were so domestic, Togo," she said. "Do you do windows, too?"

Bridger looked at LN, a straight forward glance that caught and held her captive for a moment. "For good fried chicken regularly, I would," he answered.

"Why, Togo, that sounds like a proposition," She paused, then added, "after a fashion."

"A handyman's offer, LN," he said. "Nothing more."

Bridger and LN kidded each other easily. Before Bridger and his wife separated, the ~~couple~~ shared many good times with LN and Southgate. When Togo's wife left him, LN and Southgate made certain their close relationship with Togo continued for they were genuinely fond of him.

"The chicken's ready," LN said. "How about the salad?"

"Needs a few more tomato slices."

LN opened the refrigerator and took out a dish of potato salad.

"Togo, I have some white Rhine wine. Let's have some with our dinner."

"Perfect," he said, placing the tossed salad on the table.

Later that night, Southgate sat in the den of his own townhouse, absorbed in his plotting.

He'd telephoned LN and talked to both her and Togo but declined the invitation to join them for dessert. For the second time that day, he'd been offered fresh apple pie. First by the blonde waitress at the Hickory Pit, then by LN. Apple pie and LN were certainly a wholesome combination but he wanted to begin planning.

Earlier, he thought primarily of money. As the day progressed, however, visions of besting Weber dominated his brain until the two aims had reversed positions. and Weber was now uppermost in his mind.

He pondered the rumors of Weber's infidelity in office which John Parron brought him. The man couldn't become governor, Southgate told himself, he was too insular, too out-of-date, too pompous. Outfoxing Weber, as a favor to the people of Tennessee, was certainly justifiable if it kept him out of the governor's office and in the process, as part of the fallout, Southgate, for eternity, would even the score. Ah, the fine line between justice and revenge.

Weber's remark to LN that "Dixie won't be ours anymore" still rankled twenty four hours later. But everything Weber did upset Southgate sooner or later. He'd virtually told Southgate he didn't belong. Certainly, the two men were as different as night and day. Southgate was part of a new South. Weber was cut from the cloth of an old South ruled by the cult of good ole boys. To Southgate, Weber was like some low but indestructable form of political life.

The desire for power, he mused, is a horrible disease.

But, Southgate had never gone to the brink with his disaffection for Weber. He'd always backed off before. Both of them had. There'd never been a showdown. Now, Southgate had convinced himself, was the time to go ahead. His last chance. If Weber became governor, the opportunity would be gone forever.

Southgate shuddered. God, how adroit he'd have to be to show up Weber as a fool.

Southgate's thoughts reverted to money. Everyone ought to be rich once in his life, Southgate concluded, just to get the feel it. The privilege should be passed around, each in turn enjoying it for a year or two.

Southgate recalled the Mardi Gras he, LN and Togo had gone to in New Orleans a year ago. There was equality there in the streets, everyone rubbing shoulders and bent on one thing, a grand time. There was an equality about festivals, Southgate thought. It was the same whether it was the Cotton Carnival in Memphis, the running of the bulls in Pamplona or the carnival in Rio.

Yes, Southgate thought, festivals were wonderful equalizers of people for a few days for there was the united goal of having a good time for rich and poor alike. When they were over, of course, it was better to rich again.

Southgate thought anew about his plan to borrow Elvis. Driving home he'd decided the only possible way to do it was to tunnel into Graceland from outside. He'd ruled out bribing the guards as too risky. An honest one might turn him in and, anyway, too many people would be involved in the plan. If he tried to open the grave by gunpoint, the guards might shoot back. But most of all, removing the marker and entering the grave from the top couldn't be done in secrecy. Just the equipment alone would give him away for God's sake. Southgate shook his head. He couldn't dig the tunnel alone, for sure. He'd need help. And the project would be expensive.

For a minute, Southgate thought about his old age. Maybe he was going to have to take care of that by himself, too. The social security system wasn't too healthy. He'd better start thinking in terms of never getting that. It seemed prudent with the warnings out of Washington that the system was almost broke.

Southgate put down his pencil and stood up. He stretched his arms toward the ceiling and took a deep breath. A cold beer would hit the spot, he thought.

Southgate left his study and went down into the kitchen, where he opened the refrigerator door and scanned the shelves. There, back in one corner, were a half a dozen bottles of light brew. Southgate took one and closed the refrigerator door. He removed the cap and returned to the study, the bottle in one hand, a glass in the other. Seated again at his desk, he poured half of the bottle of beer into the glass. His hand around the glass felt cool as the golden liquid, topped by a ring of white foam, rose to the top.

Southgate took a long swallow, then put the glass down next to the bottle on the desk.

If he tunneled in, he thought, he would need someone with a knowledge of engineering and geology. For the first time he considered Togo Bridger as a partner. He pondered the situation for a long time. Maybe Togo would think he was insane. Gone bannanas, as his students would put it.



But, he remembered clearly Togo's remark earlier in the day about being in a tight money situation himself with no prospects of betterment. Southgate knew that Togo, like himself, loved the life of a college professor. To preserve that and have a nest egg besides, he might be amicable to helping Southgate.

If he presented a thorough plan to Togo to demonstrate his own determination, Southgate was sure his close friend would give him a fair hearing. One conclusion was certain, Southgate thought, if he approached Togo and he said no, the idea too, would be finished.

Southgate leaned back and downed another swallow of beer. He pushed his chair back and stretched out his legs. He looked at his watch. The time was nine-forty. Just fourteen hours earlier he'd been standing shaving, never a thought before about Elvis. It seemed so long ago. Southgate enjoyed another sip of beer. He poured the rest of the bottle into the glass and watched the foam come to a head again. His mind continued to work on a next step. The logical move, it seemed to him, would be to return to Graceland again and determine the location for a tunnel. He hadn't been thinking in those terms on his first visit a few hours ago. Now, he thought he should reconnoiter the estate from that point of view, add that new dimension to his observations.

Southgate tipped his glass upward to finish off his beer. There was nothing more he could do tonight. He turned off the light in his den and returned to the kitchen. He dumped the disposable bottle in the trash basket and rinsed out the glass and turned it bottoms up in the dish drying rack next to the sink.

As he walked from the kitchen, the front door chimes sounded and the door opened wide enough for LN's head to appear around the edge.

"Hi, want some company?" she asked.

"Come on in. Togo with you?"

"Didn't he stop here?"

"Not since I talked to you."

"He said he might stop. Guess he changed his mind. Maybe he was all talked out."

"Well, I saw him this afternoon."

"He's very curious about your errand. It's taken on an extra dimension since you still weren't home by dark."

"Well, how about that?"

"He claims you're a creature of great habit, a person of order. He thinks something is changing your routine."

Southgate laughed. His eyes sparkled with delight. LN looked at him questioningly.

"I told him you might be doing work for your bar association committee," she said.

Southgate continued to smile. "You're both making a federal case out of this. I didn't know I was observed this closely."

"It's only because Togo wanted someone to talk to. He was wound up pretty tight. He got home to find a letter from Sarah saying she was going to have to ask for more child support in the fall. She said the kids need it for school."

"He'd mentioned to me this afternoon that he was already having a tough time."

"Well, he wanted you to commiserate with him."

"I wish I'd known. I would have joined you."

"I didn't know what was on his mind until after we called you. Even so, it would have been difficult to tell you to drop everything and come over."

"I suppose."

LN stepped up in front of Southgate and puckered up her lips. "I've got to go," she said. "Give me a little kiss goodnight."

Southgate pecked her lightly on the lips. "I'll walk you back home," he said. "The fresh air will feel good."

Outside, it was a soft southern night. The fresh smell of spring was in the air. The stars shown with mild radiance. Southgate wondered who was out there. He was sure all those those tiny lights weren't just for his enjoyment.

"We've got to help Togo," LN said.

Southgate nodded and bit his lip. "In anyway we can," he replied.

At her door, Southgate kissed LN again briefly, preoccupied again with his plans, then turned back toward his own place. LN, who expected him to come in, watched his departure with mixed feelings of amusement and disappointment.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Nine

On Friday, Southgate stopped to see Gleamer Westfall as he had promised him earlier in the week at the Chaplin film festival. The office of Delta's president was in the southwest corner of Old Main and was furnished tastefully in light birch wood furniture on red pile carpeting with red drapes hung at the sides of the stately glass paneled windows. The room had a coziness about it that made for pleasant visits and Southgate enjoyed making calls on Gleamer there.

"Good morning, Brax," the president greeted him as Southgate entered. He motioned for Southgate to sit down. "Nice of you to remember our talk of the other night."

"Always at your service, chief," Southgate replied, and he meant it.

Of course, no faculty member ever ignored a summons from the college president. But Gleamer always put them at ease. Southgate understood this and he appreciated the courtesy Westfall always extended. Westfall was a congenial man, somewhat scholarly, but more than anything else an administrator and fund raiser. In fact, the latter was his chief role at Delta.

Before his wife died, the Westfalls had always held open house for the faculty on football weekends. Sometimes monied alumni were also present and inevitably Gleamer would announce a gift to the school. Southgate had enjoyed the parties. He was fond of Gleamer.

Southgate settled down in a chair in front of Westfall's desk. His friend eyed him for a moment, then, without further preliminaries, said, "Brax, I'm going to remarry."

Southgate's lips parted to speak, but Westfall rushed ahead. "She's an alumnae of Delta," he said filling in the particulars. "A widow, but younger than I am. Her name is Barbara Ogilive O'Thomas and everyone calls her Boots because of the initials. She's from Kingsport over in the eastern end of the state. I met her on one of my trips to raise funds."

Obviously, that wasn't the only thing raised, Southgate thought, smiling inwardly. Westfall was still a healthy, robust man, the best tennis player on the faculty, in fact. Maybe he wouldn't devote so much time to the game after his marriage and Southgate would be able to win a few sets now and then.

"Gleamer, that's good news. Congratulations," Southgate said. He stood and shook Westfall's hand. The Delta president gripped his friend warmly.

"She's a great gal, Brax. You'll all like her. She's full of life." Westfall paused seemingly slightly embarrassed. Then a roughish smile broke across his face. "Somewhat of a looker, too."

"I'm anxious to meet her," Southgate said.

"In due time, Brax. We're going to be married in Kingsport, then take a European honeymoon."

"Have you picked the date?"

"The last Saturday in April. She'd like a garden wedding at her home. We'll leave for London from there."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Two months. We'll motor through France and West Germany, then head down through Austria to Italy and finally to Greece. Then home."

"It sounds like a wonderful trip."

Westfall hesitated, looking Southgate in the eye. After a few moments he spoke. "I have one problem, Brax.," he said slowly. "Boots, Mrs. O'Thomas that is, won't come back to the farm with Carrie still there. You know Carrie is buried on the land. That was her wish."

"I know, Gleaner. I've seen the grave many times as I've driven up to the house. It's beautifully kept."

The lines on Westfall's face tightened. Finally, he spoke again.

"Brax, while I'm gone I'd like you to take care of the legal details to have Carrie moved to a more conventional resting place. Perhaps, one of the cemeteries in Memphis."

Southgate looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, then said, "I'd be happy to do it. Rest assured it will be safe to bring the new Mrs. Westfall home from your honeymoon."

Westfall's face relaxed. "That's splendid, Brax. Really nice of you."

"No trouble, Gleaner," Southgate reassured him.

Westfall smiled. "It's a funny thing, Brax. Carrie was a great Elvis Presley fan. It was too serious then but I can laugh at it now. She's buried in a copper casket just like his. She wanted to be, so I did it."



Southgate sat listening. "It was the proper thing to do, Gleamer," he said when Westfall paused. "It was sweet of you." After a silent few seconds, Southgate leaned forward in his chair. "I'll take good care of Carrie," he said softly. "There'll be some papers to sign before you go. I'll need a power of attorney."

Westfall leaned back, his eyes raised towards the ceiling. "Whenever you're ready." His thoughts drifted. "I never thought I'd remarry, Brax," he said at last. "Carrie was very dear to me, something special. Of course, I didn't know everything about her." He gave a little laugh as if the joke were on him. "I didn't percieve her devotion to Elvis until she died. Now I'll be learning things about Boots for the rest of my life."

"No matter how long you know one, you'll never know everything about a woman," Southgate remarked.

"So true. So true,"

With that, Westfall lowered his eyes again.

"You'll be gone during the Cotton Carnival," Southgate said.

"I thought about that. Dean Watkins has agreed to handle my usual duties on behalf of Delta." Westfall raised one of his bushy, black eyebrows. "You might keep an eye on him. I'm a little anxious about the school float. We've always had such a good one."

"Check," Southgate said.

Westfall changed the subject. "Do you think LN will raise the money for our Presley library, Brax?" he asked. "The building would be a very worthwhile addition to the campus. The entire concept of a center to study the Presley era in music would give Delta recognition as an innovator. We're not as strong in music as we should be. There's more to it than a good marching band at halftime."

"She'll make it," Southgate said. "I'll bet on it."

"I'll be very proud of her if she does. I should have a talk with her before I leave on my honeymoon. Give her some encouragement."

"Speaking of your honeymoon," Southgate said. "Should I mention your forthcoming marriage to anyone?"

"We're announcing the date and all the rest tomorrow at a reception in Kingsport. Then, in the fall, when we're all settled in here, thanks to you, we'll have the faculty in for Boots to meet. Some of the oldtimers might know her already, especially the liberal arts professors. She majored in English literature."

"We'll all look forward to that," Southgate told him. "I won't mention Carrie to anyone. I'll just do it quietly."

The two men stood and Westfall walked Southgate to the door. "Take good care of her, Brax," Westfall said.

The following Tuesday, LN arrived at her office dressed, as they say, fit to kill. She had on a dark rose, long sleeved shirtwaist dress molded to her figure. She wore high heeled, navy blue suede shoes with a matching shoulder bag. Gold knot earrings adorned her earlobes. Her ash blonde hair shone from washing and brushing. Her perfume was Woodhuse.

LN had skipped her jogging that morning. There were many disappointed admirers along her usual route but word had preceded her nonappearance that she was entertaining an important visitor that day in connection with the proposed library building.

By noon, the day was sunny and warm. LN, all bubbly and a pillar of charm, greeted Axelbank in front of the regular school library when he arrived.

"Let's walk over to the union," she said. "You can see some of the campus."

Axelbank nodded.

"Let's go then," she said gaily.

There was small talk about the weather and the beauty of a college campus.

"There's a feeling about it," LN said. "An aura of camaraderie devoted to the mind."

"And Saturday football," Axelbank put in.

"Oh, that," LN said. "That's just for a few weeks in autumn. A library is forever."

"A stadium is made of pretty solid stuff, too," Axelbank responded.

LN flashed a bright smile. "You're teasing me," she said.

She'd reserved a prominent table in the center of the faculty dining room for their lunch.

"The catfish is always excellent," LN said, once they were seated. "Fresh from the Mississippi every morning." She paused. "The small steak is always good, too."

Axelbank looked over the menu. "I believe I'll have the crab cakes and cole slaw," he said.

"They're good, too," LN said hastily. She ordered a julienne salad bowl with Russian dressing.

After the waiter left the table, Westfall entered the dining room. LN waved to him discreetly as if by prearranged signal, which it was. LN had left no stone unturned. If Axelbank could be had, she was determined to get him.

"Gleamer, I want you meet Alan Axelbank," she gushed. "You know of him, of course. He's president of the International Federation of Elvis Presley fan clubs." Turning toward Axelbank, she said, "Alan, this is Gleamer Westfall, Delta's president."

"Don't get up," Westfall said, shaking Axelbank's hand. "Just enjoy your lunch with us."

"I have a lovely companion," Axelbank said. "You do things up well here at Delta."

"I'll be honest, Mr. Axelbank," Westfall said. "We hope to impress you."

Axelbank smiled. Westfall glanced at LN. "I'm going to show him the site of the Presley library after lunch," she said.

"Excellent," Westfall said. Then turning directly to Axelbank, he said. "It would be an important step in the sociological study of rock 'n roll."

"So I understand from Miss Gladfelter," Axelbank replied.

"An interesting concept."

"Well, you two talk it over," Westfall said. "It was nice to meet you, Mr. Axelbank." The Delta president turned and walked to another table on the far side of the dining room. The waiter removed a "reserved" sign and poured Westfall a glass of water.

"I discovered an interesting facet of Elvis' life the other day," LN said when she and Axelbank were alone again. "He used to go down to black clubs on Hernando street and listen to the performers when he first started out."

Axelbank screwed up one eye. "Do you know where?"

"I talked to Rush Thierry, an old black promoter, He didn't mention any one specific place. It's interesting since it was Elvis' combination of black rhythm and blues and white country that became rock 'n roll."

"If I knew the names of the clubs, I could put them on the fan club tours," Axelbank said. "They'd eat that up."

"I'm going to interview Thierry on tape for our oral history section," LN said. "I'll be getting a lot more information."

Just then, the waiter brought their food. Both of them fell silent for a few minutes as they ate their first bites.

"Say, these crab cakes are good," Axelbank said, finally breaking the stillness. LN nodded.

"Alan, the city in which he lived played a large role in Elvis' music," she said after a bite of salad. "To me that connection is important to preserve. Elvis didn't just arrive full blown. He combined a lot of different sounds he heard here into a new form. We can trace it with a library and study center."

Axelbank ate on. When they were through with the meal, they walked back to LN's office, where she picked up the architect's sketch in preparation to showing Axelbank the site.

"I like these paintings," he said pointing to the modernist art on her walls.

"Thank you," LN said. She put the sketch under her arm. "Shall we go?"

LN led Axelbank out of the office and down the hall. About halfway to the stairs, a door opened abruptly on their right and a young woman in jeans and a peek-a-boo white blouse covered with blotches of paint came rushing out. She wore no bra.

"He's gotten paint all over my clothes," she sobbed. He's a wild man. He promised he'd do my portrait. Instead he attacked me."

"Thelma, calm down," LN said. "I'm sure Gershon meant you no harm. You know how affectionate he is toward you. Why, you're practically engaged."

"He's a beast," Thelma said matter-of-factly.

"Well, you're not exactly clothed for a nunnery," LN said.

"I wore what he asked me to."

Axelbank turned his glance away from Thelma and looked, somewhat apprehensively, into the room from which she'd fled. Inside, he saw an enormous hulk of a man stripped to the waist with tempera paint of several different colors rubbed all over his stomach and hairy chest. He was barefooted. His only article of clothing was a pair of cut away, paint splattered Bermuda shorts.

This was Gershon Wingo, the modernist painter and Delta's wrestling coach. Togo Bridger was his mentor.



As Axelbank watched, the artist picked up a canvas and held it directly in front of himself. The paint on his body glistened in the neon light from overhead. It seemed at least an inch thick to the promotor.

To Axelbank, Wingo seemed immune to the commotion in the hall. He pulled the canvas to his body and with vigorous, rolling motions rubbed it over his rippling muscles.

After a few moments, Wingo held the canvas away from himself admiringly. Then, he pulled it close again and rubbed it over specific areas of his body. First the upper right corner. Then a dab in the middle. Then on the left edge.

By now, the canvas was an explosion of colors. Yellows, Blues. Orange. Red. A touch of black. Axelbank, in fact, was impressed. Already, even from a distance, he'd noticed the similarity with those hanging down the hall in LN's office.

With a grunt, Wingo turned and came into the hall. He thrust the painting at Thelma, who tossed back her head defiantly. "Here," he said, shoving it out to her. "I did you from memory."

Thelma studied the canvas. Then, she threw her arms around the painter, smearing herself with colors. "Oh, Gershon," she cried, "forgive me." She kissed him lightly on the cheek.

"Pardon me," Axelbank said, tapping Wingo on the shoulder, "but I'm impressed with your work. Is it for sale?"

Wingo stepped back from Thelma and they both turned toward Axelbank. The artist was wide-eyed.

"Forgive me," interrupted LN. Let me introduce you two. Gershon this is Alan Axelbank, president of the International Federation of Elvis Presley Fan Clubs. Alan, this is Gershon Wingo and Thelma Stroud. Gershon did the paintings in my office."

"I think he's very talented," said Axelbank.

Thelma gave the artist another hug, transferring more paint to herself.

"Miss Gladfelter and I are on our way to see the site of the proposed Presley library now," Axelbank said. "If you're still here when we get back maybe we can strike a bargain for several of your works."

"I'll be there in my studio," Wingo said, pointing toward the room.

"I'll see you then," Axelbank said.

With that, he and LN proceeded down the hall again. Wingo and Thelma together, hand in hand, both now covered with paint, re-entered the studio.

"We let him use the room," LN said. "It would be vacant otherwise."

"Look upon it as underwriting the arts," Axelbank commented.

The proposed site of the Presley library was across the street and down a block. It was a large open space with adequate room for a building and landscaped grounds.

LN unrolled the sketch and together she and Axelbank viewed the location.

"I like the design," Axelbank said.

"The building would look very natural here," LN said. She guided him around the perimeter, holding the sketch out at the several stops for Axelbank to study the angle. Then, they started back to her office.

"Have you thought anymore about the derby?" Axelbank asked.

LN tossed him a wry glance. "Have you thought anymore about a donation to the library," she countered. "Now, you've seen the site."

"I'd like to see the library built," Axelbank said, but he didn't commit himself.

Axelbank's chauffeur was parked at the curb when they got back to LN's office.

"Wait here for me," he told his driver. "I'm going back inside for a few minutes."

When he re-appeared, he gingerly carried two paintings by his finger tips.. He handed them to his chauffeur. "Careful," he said, "They're not quite dry."

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Ten

Several days elapsed before Southgate was able to return to Graceland. The weekend intervened and after Togo's curiosity the first time, he felt uncomfortable about a second trip on their days off. Then, on Monday, Graceland was closed as usual.

The first day he was free to slip away was Wednesday and he left the campus shortly after his class let out at noon and drove directly to the estate. He parked in the shopping center lot again and fell in line with the other tourists at the Music Gate, a camera slung over his shoulder and carrying a jacket.

Although he felt warm enough in just his sweater, the day was partly cloudy and a slight wind blew out of the north making it chilly when the sun disappeared for a few minutes now and then.

Southgate looked like all the other visitors traipsing up the drive, many of them also with cameras. Some walked alone, others in small groups. Southgate ambled along with the flow, feeling relaxed and secure.

At the grave, he studied the site from several angles as he milled about with the crowd. Then, he took a number of photographs, always being careful to slightly overlap each succeeding shot with the last with the idea of eventually fitting together a panoramic view.

Southgate likened his technique to that of the old photographer who took the senior class picture back in Wabasha. Everyone stood perfectly still while the old guy took a couple of time shots. Harry Danielson had stood at one end, then run behind the class and appeared again at the other side.

Southgate laughed. He hadn't thought of that day in twenty years.

In all, Southgate took a dozen shots, some with the fountain in the background, some with the temple-like columns as the backdrop, including the curving wall behind them with the four stained glass windows. He worked slowly, taking several photos, then mingling again with the other visitors.

Finally, he walked down the steps of the terraced garden onto the driveway again and took a longshot of the grass lawn sloping downward toward the boulevard and the shopping center beyond. He turned, and standing on the same spot, took a couple of shots of the white wooden fence running along the side of the estate behind the garden.

Southgate estimated the grassy space between the fence and the curved wall of the garden covered about twenty feet. Then, there was some heavy foliage and beyond that buildings. Southgate hadn't noticed these on his initial visit. Now, he realized that there was a row of homes beyond the fence.

Southgate stepped back onto the terrace around the gravesite and informally walked off the distance from Elvis' marker to the center of the curved wall. He estimated the distance at eighteen feet. He returned to the marker, turned at a right angle and stepped down from the terrace and walked across the driveway. That distance was approximately twenty-one feet.

There was no way to get beyond the drive onto the grass going down to the highway without arousing the security guards, so Southgate stood at the edge making mental notes. After about 24 feet, the wall on the south edge of the estate was stone again, a continuation really of the front — fence along U.S. 51.

Southgate also noticed a fence to his right. This one separated the manicured lawn around the mansion from the pasture-like grass in front of him. As he stood there gazing down the slope, he realized how far it was to the shopping center. Slowly, he started walking down the drive to the gate. At first, he counted his paces. But the drive curved away so sharply from a straight line that he stopped.

In the shopping center, Southgate mulled his situation over. He decided that his next step would be to complete the distance figures for the highway and the shopping center. Already, he noticed that the closed laundermat was in a straight line from the gravesite.

Southgate went back to the highway crossing from the shopping center and the Music Gate and fell in again with the tourists moving back and forth across the road. From the front wall to the highway, it was 30 feet. The highway itself was 75 feet wide. Next, Southgate walked over to the door of the laundermat and paced off the distance to the west edge of U.S. 51. This was another 189 feet.

As he walked, Southgate considered the possibility of using the laundermat as the entrance for the tunnel. It could be reopened as a legitimate operation, while, at the same time, serving as a front for the clandestine burrowing. It would have advantages. Those engaged in the tunneling could come and go freely, either as employees of the laundermat or as customers.

He thought about the dirt. There'd be lots of it. Little by little, he supposed, it could be removed. There was an alley behind the building. Trucks could move in and out of there without drawing attention if the trips were planned on an irregular basis. The dirt would have to be removed in containers or people told that the basement under the laundry was being expanded.

Southgate laughed. Maybe the dirt could be washed out through the laundry machines. He'd have to think about that.



Southgate reviewed what he'd done. The one measurement he didn't have was the big one from the grave to the highway. He'd already ruled out the driveway as too inaccurate. So, he crossed U. S. 51 and walked along the sidewalk in front of the wall. At the corner, where it turned east and went up the slope, he'd hoped there might be a path. Instead, he found a stream that ran along for 40 feet or so and then turned south. The backyards of the homes adjoining the estate came next, but they were full of bushes and private fences.

Southgate continued along the sidewalk, past a podiatry clinic, to a cross street. A green sign resting atop a metal post identified the thoroughfare as "Dolan." The houses running along the estate fronted here. Southgate turned and walked up Dolan, counting his paces as he went. When he reached the spot opposite the white fence, he'd gone 612 feet. He shook his head. It was a long way to dig and that wasn't counting the distance under the highway and from the road back to the laundermat.

Southgate took out a small notebook and jotted down the individual distances. From the grave to the driveway, twenty-one feet. From the driveway to the start of the stone fence, another twenty-four feet. Along the stone fence to the sidewalk, 612 feet. The sidewalk, thirty feet. Under the highway, seventy-five feet. Back to the laundermat 189 feet. The total distance from laundermat to grave was 951 feet.

Southgate gazed at the houses along Dolan drive. They were brick, some with carports, others with garages. Most of them were for two cars. It was a typical upper middle class neighborhood. The yards were well kept and neat. Southgate knew he could be at home here. As he walked back to U.S. 51, he decided to step off the distance from the stone wall to the front of the houses since they were lined up evenly, one beside the other, like cadets at a West Point dress parade. This distance came to only 150 feet. To that, add another forty eight feet and you're at the grave, Southgate thought. The latter included the distance from the white wooden fence to the curved wall at the south end of the gravesite and the distance from the wall to the grave itself.

"Well," Southgate muttered to himself. "It doesn't take an engineer to realize the houses are closer to the grave than the laundromat."

Still, the laundermat intrigued him. It certainly was more of a challenge from there going first under the shopping center parking lot, then the highway, then up the slope. It would be quite a feat to dig a tunnel like that. But bravado is one thing, Southgate mused, reality is another.

It might be possible to buy a house on Dolan adjoining the estate and more or less in line with the grave, he thought.

Southgate had lots of thoughts, none of them conclusive. He knew some of the possibilities and some of the limitations. He had his photographs. He knew something of the security around the estate. He had some feel for the everyday life of the neighborhood. As he walked back to his car, he pondered his next move. He wasn't sure yet, but it might be time to approach Togo. He needed advice on tunneling. He could ask Togo some general questions, maybe get some feel of his friend's attitude from his responses.

Southgate wondered how financially strapped Togo really was. His friend had never been prone to exaggeration. And He'd never known him to talk openly about Sarah asking for money before. Southgate climbed into his convertible and started the engine. He pulled slowly out the parking lot and turned north into U.S. 51. Passing the Music Gate, he again thought of returning to Graceland sometime at night and check the activity there after dark. It wasn't something he had to do immediately, however.

As he drove toward home, he wondered who lived in the houses along Dolan drive. If he knew the addresses, he could check the names in a criss-cross, an area directory in which residents are listed by their house numbers. Southgate pulled over into the center lane. When the southbound traffic broke he wheeled his car into a parking lot adjoining a bank, made a U-turn and pulled back into U.S. 51 heading south again.

At Dolan, he made a left turn and drove slowly down the street. The houses were in the 1400s. The one directly in line with the grave was 1463. Southgate made a slow U-turn at the first corner and drove back to the highway. He turned north again. This time, he could think of nothing more to do. He turned on the car radio and settled back for the drive. He was just in time to beat the rush hour traffic.

\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Eleven

Late the next afternoon, Southgate met Togo in the faculty lounge in Old Main. The room was deserted except for elderly Matt Brown, Delta's venerable professor of philosophy, who was asleep in a large, overstuffed chair in one corner, an open book balanced precariously on his lap.

Usually, the walnut paneled room, with its sedate, traditional furniture, was empty at that time of the day. But a slumbering occupant was still no obstacle.

"We can talk leisurely here," Southgate said, leading his close friend to the opposite side of the room from their dozing colleague. "Let's sit down." Togo appeared gloomy and a little anxious. Southgate looked at him with concern. "I'm sorry I missed you the other night," he said.

A smile wavered on Togo's face for an instant. "Oh, that's all right. LN and I had a good talk. Sarah's going to ask the court for more support money. Frankly, Brax, I don't know where I'm going to get it here at Delta."

Southgate squeezed easily into the opening. "I've got an idea on that," he said. His smile was warm. "Maybe you won't have to leave Delta."

"Where else is there?" Togo asked gently. "Sure, I could go into private industry. But a man ought to be able to do what he likes. I love teaching and research."

Southgate nodded his head in sympathy and the feeling was genuine. He admired Togo deeply. The man was an excellent teacher, who had done commendable exploration in his field. There was a touch of top drawer about him. Before his divorce, he'd been satisfied, a rugged down-to-earth individual. It had been Sarah who was discontent.

Southgate thought again about Togo's natural ability for mechanics. The man was a perennial putterer. It was this trait, along with his geological knowledge, that Southgate wanted to put to use in his plans.

"Maybe I could get a worthwhile research grant from someone," Togo said. "I want to help Sarah. But I want to stay here." He sighed. "Our relationship is like a bone caught in my throat."

"We need to get rid of that bone," Southgate said.

Togo nodded. From the far corner came a loud snore and then a long, rippling whiffle. Both men laughed. Togo's mood seemed to change. Suddenly, he seemed relaxed, stronger again and more comfortable.

"You've been curious about my errand the other day," Southgate said. "Well, I drove out to Graceland. You know Van Weber is going for governor. I have an idea to stop him and at the same time, if you want to help me, you'll get your money."

"What are you up to?" Togo grinned. It was a welcome sight to Southgate.

"It's no Mickey Mouse stunt, Togo. I'm talking about millions of dollars."

Togo gave his friend a curious look. "Sure." He laughed. "A million here, a million there. Pretty soon it adds up to real money."

"I'm serious," Southgate said. "Listen to me. I'm going to borrow Elvis for a few days, create a mystery. I know Weber. He'll stick his big nose into the investigation, try to take it over with his

police. He'll think he can slide into the governor's chair on the publicity surrounding the solution. He's that way and has been ever since I first knew him in school. He'll take over anything that he thinks will advance his career. Well, this time, it will be his downfall. He won't solve the mystery. We're going to outsmart him."

Togo sat up. His eyes shone with the light of discovery. "And pick up several million dollars at the same time." There was an easy give and take between the two men. "But, Brax, we don't want to take money from Elvis' daughter. That would be mean. People won't stand for it."

Southgate smiled. "We're not going to get involved with his family."

"Who then?"

"First, we'll tunnel in and remove the casket from the vault to just a few feet away. It won't even leave the gravesite. It's a legal technicality, but if the body doesn't leave the gravesite, Weber will have a hard time even proving a crime."

Togo felt a shimmy of fear skitter up his back. "God, Brax," he said. His mouth dropped open in awe. Then, he listened again, his face tense and his eyes, a dark, searching brown, fixed on Southgate.

"You mentioned the money," Southgate said, returning Togo's gaze. Togo nodded. "The television networks have plenty. We'll sell the rights of disclosure of the story to the highest bidder. It'll be one of the biggest exclusives in years. Viewers will be on the edge of their chairs. The networks will offer a lot of bucks for that kind of audience."

"I agree, Brax, there would be tremendous interest. Elvis was one of the most popular men in the world. Still is, in fact."

"That isn't all. As part of the TV package, we'll demand two minutes of air time, which we, in turn, will sell."



"To the highest bidder again?" Togo asked.

"Certainly. There are a lot of people in the world who have a message they'd like to spread. Think of all the corporations. The labor unions. The politicians. Even nations for that matter. They all feel misunderstood at one time or another. Someone will be eager to buy this time from us. A lot can be said in two minutes." He paused. "I'd want a worthwhile message, of course. We'll have to screen the applicants carefully."

Over in the far corner, old Matt Brown's snow white head rocked from side to side. He gave a snort, then his chin fell on his frail chest again. Southgate watched him for a moment, then turned back to Togo. "Let's go before Matt wakes up," he said. "I'll drive you home. We can talk more during the ride."

Togo glanced furtively across the room. Already, he felt like a conspirator. The two men rose and tiptoed from the lounge.

"I'd be set for life if this works out, Brax," Togo said as they walked from the building.

The morning had been foggy and damp. Later, the fog had lifted but a bank of tightly knit cumulus clouds remained. Now, these had begun to disintegrate and sunlight streaked through the gaps, stabbing patches of yellow light on the green campus.

Southgate turned his head sideways toward Togo. "Everyone ought to be rich once in his life," he said. "Just once to get the feel of it." There was an amused timber in his voice. Fine lines crinkled away from the outside corners of his frank blue eyes. "The privilege should be passed around, each one, in turn, enjoying it for a year or two. It's our turn, Togo. It's our turn."

"And we'll give Weber a good kick in the ass, too."

Southgate tossed his head back with a laugh. He wrapped his arm around Togo's shoulder and gave him an affectionate hug. "Check," he said.

"I hope the angels are on our side," Togo remarked.

"Elvis was a generous man, Togo. He'd understand our plight. He'll talk those angels around. When I first thought of this, I had the feeling that somehow he'd enjoy it. He was just that kind of guy."

They reached Southgate's convertible and climbed in.

"This is the right car for clandestine operations," Togo remarked touching its black, canvas roof. "With no top bulb, the interior is never lighted at night when the doors open."

Southgate nodded. "We'll have to get used to working with little or no light anyway," he said. "Tunnels are dark places."

Southgate turned the key in the ignition and the motor turned over. He slipped the car into low gear and they pulled away, slowing for the speed bumps as they wound their way off campus. Once in the city streets, Togo pondered the consequences of failure.

"What happens if we are caught?" he asked

"As I said, we're not going to take the casket from the gravesite," Southgate replied. His tone was confident. "This eliminates a lot of law right there. We could be charged with injury to a tomb. Even there, the odds are with us. The penalty is minor. Weighed against the rewards, I figure the gamble is worth it."

"What is the penalty, Brax?" Togo asked. His voice was low, uncertain.

Southgate tried to weigh his friend's concern, to measure whether Togo was wavering. For a few moments, he drove on in silence, his eyes straight ahead on the road. He'd convinced himself the risk was small. Now, he had to do the same with Togo.

"If we're discovered, we'd be tried on a misdemeanor. The penalty for that in Tennessee is no more than one year in jail or a fine of not more than \$1,000." Southgate paused, then added, "Or both. We also could be liable for any damage to the tomb if sued in a civil action."

"That's all?"

"That's it," Southgate said.

Togo straightened up in his seat. "I could get more than that for non-support of my children." But then his voice became apprehensive again. "What about extortion?"

"Whom are we going to extort?"

Togo hesitated. "I'm not sure. The networks? The people we sell time to?"

"Those are straight business deals. They won't be threatened. No demands will be put upon them. They either purchase the rights or they don't. They'll be getting something of value to them in return for their money. That money is a fee to us for services rendered."

"What about kidnapping?" His voice was tight.

"I don't see how that applies. We're not going to hold anything, or anyone, for ransom."

Togo took a deep breath and exhaled. Both men were silent now. After several blocks, it was Togo who spoke again. "It does sound like the risk is small, Brax," he said.

"Togo, you shouldn't wait until the last roll of the dice before taking action to counter Sarah," Southgate asserted. "We could get started on this right away. Then, when the time comes, you'll be prepared."

Togo half turned toward Southgate. A strange thrill ran through him. Suddenly, he felt an odd sense of enormous power, like he could have control of his life again. He screwed up one eye. There was great gusto in his voice. "What's our first step?" he asked.

Southgate turned into the block on which Togo lived. "I think I ought to drive you out to Graceland. You ought to see the layout first hand."

"How about Saturday morning?"

"Perfect."

Southgate pulled up in front of a big, rambling two story frame house with a large porch wrapped around the front and one side. Togo had lived alone there for the last two years. At times, he'd thought of moving. But always, when the decision was at hand, he'd decided to stay on, even when LN and Southgate encouraged him to move into their townhouse complex several blocks away.

As he climbed out the car, Togo hesitated. "Why don't you come over for breakfast," he said. "We can drive out to Graceland from here."

"Let's take your car," Southgate said. "Mine's getting to be a regular out there."

"Fair enough. See you Saturday."

Southgate waved as he drove off.

On Saturday morning, Southgate and Togo were among the first visitors to arrive at Graceland when the Music Gate opened at nine o'clock.

"After you've seen the gravesite, I'll explain the alternatives we have for tunneling," Southgate said as they walked up the drive. Across the road in the shopping center, the sun's rays reflected off of the windshield of Togo's car. It was a pleasant day with a promise of warmth later.

When they reached the terrace, Southgate stopped on the top steps. With a sweep of his right arm, he pointed, in turn, to the fountains and wishing pool, the markers, the Greek columns and the curved wall with its four stained glass windows. Togo followed the arm's movement with his eyes.

"I consider all of this the gravesite," Southgate said. "If anything here on top was willfully damaged, I think that would be the legal finding. So, we have this area to work with underneath once we tunnel in."

"Yeah, but what's underneath?"

"The coffin is in a concrete vault. Obviously, there are pipes for the fountains. But we won't be working in that area."

Togo looked closely at his companion. "How did you find out about the vault?"

Southgate smiled. "I did some research at the public library. The information was carried in a story in the Press-Scimitar." Southgate pointed to the curved wall and the bi-level walkway in front of it. "It doesn't appear anything is under there."

"I agree," Togo said. "Even if there are some electric cables, they're close to the surface. They wouldn't bother us." Togo studied the wall and the walk. "There's some weight in them," he said. "The entire tunnel to the grave will have to be shored."

"Agreed," Southgate said.

Togo walked over and studied the bronze and granite markers, while Southgate remained on the steps. When Togo returned, they moved back onto the drive and gazed toward the shopping center.

"It's quite a distance," Togo said.

"From Elvis' grave to the abandoned laundermat I showed you when we got out of your car it's 951 feet. I stepped it off."

Togo shook his head. "That's a lot of digging." He looked back toward the terrace. "There's a marker on this side of his grave, too. That really complicates things. The way I figure it, we'd have to go down under that grave and then come up again underneath his."

"That's his grandmother on this side of him," Southgate said. He turned toward the south. "From the grave to those houses over there it's only 188 feet."

Togo studied the terrain. "I like that better," he said. "That's a distance we can cope with."

"It's much simpler," Southgate remarked. "From there we could come in level with his grave, too. The trouble is that's all private property. We'd have access to the shopping center. We could rent the laundermat."

"We could buy a house," Togo said.

"To do that, we need a seller."

Togo shrugged. "It would be impractical to come in here from the shopping center," he said. "It's just too far. I'm not saying it can't be done. I'm just saying it would be damned arduous."

Southgate scratched the back of his head, then smoothed down his hair again. "I drove down that street when I was out here the other day," he told Togo. "Those houses are in the 1400 block of Dolan. I thought I could use a criss-cross to see who lives in them." He reached in his pocket and pulled out the slip of paper he'd written the information down on.

Togo walked over to the end of the driveway and leaned over a knee high chain at the beginning of the grass. After a couple of minutes he returned to Southgate's side. He held his hand at his waist and pointed a finger in the direction of the houses.



"That house directly behind the third stained glass window is right on line with Elvis' marker," he said. "From there, we could come out of the basement into the yard, then under the white fence into Graceland and up the lawn to the wall. From the wall, we could go right to the concrete vault."

Southgate glanced at the slip of paper in his hand. "The address of that house is 1463 Dolan," he said. "I'll find out who lives there."

Southgate jammed the paper back in his pocket. The two men began walking down the blacktop drive. "I've seen everything I need to," Togo said.

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"I've some photographs I took the other day," Southgate said.

"We can use them for reference."

"I'd like to borrow those, if I may," Togo said.

"They're back at my townhouse, ready and waiting."

"I'll draw a diagram to scale for us," Togo said. "I'll base it on a 188 foot tunnel coming in from the house."

"We need to get inside," Southgate said.

Togo thought for a moment before he spoke. "In due time, we do," he answered. "But, it isn't necessary for my preliminary figuring."

They walked a few feet in silence. There was still a morning haze from the overnight moisture mixing with the sunlight. Off to the side of the drive, the grass was still drenched in crystals of heavy dew. Togo studied the silent mansion over his shoulder to the right.

"It's like a scene from 'Gone with the Wind' with the columned portico," he said. "Past glory seems to be hanging there shrouded in the haze as if it's being filtered back to us."

Southgate peered across the lawn. He saw everything Togo did and read the same feelings into it. At the Music Gate, they scurried across the highway as the traffic light changed. In minutes they were headed for home.

Southgate found a criss-cross in the tax assessor's office in the Shelby county courthouse. He borrowed the heavy, thick book from a clerk and stood at a nearby table to check the names of the residents of the 1400 block of Dolan drive. This took place on the Monday after Togo's exploratory tour of Graceland.

He first ran his finger down the inside column of the page where the 1400 block of Dolan was listed. There, opposite the address 1463, he found the names, Glenn and Myrtle Trimble. He wrote the information down on a yellow legal pad he took from a brown leather briefcase. To the employes in the busy clerk's office, Southgate looked every inch a working lawyer.

After he'd scribbled down the Trimbles' names, he did the same for the houses on either side of 1463. He and Togo had decided over the weekend that, if necessary, they could tunnel in at an angle from another nearby house if 1463 was unavailable. Next door to the east, at 1459, were the Rowans, Robert and Carol. The Warrens, William and Harriet lived in the house west of the Trimbles at 1469. Southgate dutifully wrote the names down on his yellow pad. Then, he closed the criss-cross and stuffed the writing tablet back in his briefcase.

"Thanks very much," he said to the clerk, a portly black man with tobacco stained teeth, as he heaved the heavy book back up on the counter.

"That didn't take long," the clerk said. "Did you find what you wanted?"

"All set," Southgate said. "If I need more information, I'll come back."

"Glad to be of help," the clerk said.

In the courthouse lobby, Southgate found a row of half-a-dozen telephones. At one end, attached to the last booth by a chain, was the Memphis directory. Southgate thumbed through it to the T's, where he ran down the names until he found "Trimble Glenn 1463 Dolan.....578 0943."

He closed the book. It was near noon. The lunch crowd was beginning to filter into the lobby as he walked across its polished marble floor to the exit.

\*\*\*\* \* \*\*\*\*

## Chapter Twelve

"This is exciting," Margaret Jean said, holding a teddy bear that once belonged to Elvis. "I've heard so much about his stuffed animals."

"We've been able to find a number of them," LN said. "There are several more still at Graceland. They're a natural for exhibiting in a Presley library."

"Oh, he's so cute," Margaret Jean said, cuddling the little, brown toy close to her bosom. "We just have to get that library built, LN. There're so many things to be saved."

The two women, who were fast becoming close friends, stood together in a room piled high with memorabilia. With Axelbank off on a trip to Chicago with several Gershon Wingo paintings, Margaret Jean had slipped out to the Delta campus to see LN's growing collection.

"So, Alan believes he can sell Gershon's work," LN remarked. "Wouldn't that be wonderful?" She flipped her head in a pointing motion. "He has Gershon painting night and day in that room down the hall."

"There are a number of small, exclusive galleries along upper Michigan avenue he's going to visit," Margaret Jean explained. "They specialize in modern art. He's sure they'll take them. Mr. Axelbank is good at that sort of thing."

"Do you know what price tag he's going to put on them?"

Margaret Jean rolled her eyes. "I heard him mention \$1,200."

"A week ago, Gershon couldn't give them away."

"But he was unknown then. It's different with Mr. Axelbank as his patron."

"I suppose so."

"It is, really. Mr. Axelbank was a tennis coach in the summers at a country club in Kentucky when he was young. He told me that when he charged \$5 a lesson, he had so many pupils he couldn't handle them. So, he raised his fee to \$7 and they still came. Then, he increased it to \$10 and there were still just as many. His point is that if people want something they'll pay for it. He's going to make them want Gershon Wingo paintings up in Chicago."

"I'm glad he went," LN said. "It gives us a chance to visit and for you to look over the Elvis material I have for the library." She pulled a little plastic doll, six inches high, from a cardboard box. It was a replica of Elvis in a sequined costume with a guitar around his neck and his legs spread apart.

"Isn't that darlin'," Margaret Jean exclaimed.

LN walked over to the far side of the room, where two wooden boxes sat on a table. "I want to move these into my office when we go," she said. "Maybe, you'll help me."

"I sure will. What's in them?"

LN reached in one and removed a stack of papers. "They're unpublished songs people sent to Elvis from all over the world. They wanted him to sing them. I need to start sorting them out. They're interesting in themselves, but, even more important, are the comments Elvis has written on them. He's even fiddled with the words or music on some."

LN handed one to Margaret Jean. "This one's from Germany."

"There's a translation of the words attached to it," Margaret Jean commented. She began to hum, then tried to sing a few bars of the words. "Not bad," she said. As she handed the sheets back to LN, she looked at her watch. "I mustn't forget my call," she said.

"When it's time, we'll go back to the office," LN told her.

"In twenty minutes," Margaret Jean said. She continued to peruse the songs, pulling one, then another from the pile LN had given her. "This is just fascinating," she said. "There must be several hundred here."

"That's why I'm anxious to go to work on them. They need to be arranged in some kind of order."

"His fans would be so interested in these," Margaret Jean said. "We arrange several tours a year. Would it be possible for them to spend time in the library?"

"Of course. Some of them, if they're music students, might even want to study here. I'd like to see specialized courses dealing with different phases of rock 'n roll. Its development. Its sounds compared to other music. Its mixture of blues and country music. These would be seminars dealing in depth with only one phase at a time. Some would last several weeks, others several months."

"There are so many things that can be done," Margaret Jean said. She put the song sheets back in the box. "I'll carry this one," she said, picking it up.

LN lifted the other box to the door and slid it out into the hall. While Margaret Jean waited, she locked the door. Then the pair of them, cradling the boxes in their arms, struggled down to LN's office.

"Let's put them here for now," LN said, lowering hers to the floor under a window. Margaret Jean dropped her box next to LN's. She glanced at her watch, then immediately picked up LN's orange telephone on the desk and dialed.



"Hello, Billy Joe," she said to the guard in the lobby of her office building, "this is Margaret Jean. I want to place a bet for Mr. Axelbank. Is Pretty Girl still running in the sixth race at Tropical Park?" She paused, waiting for his answer. "She is. Well, will you cover Mr. Axelbank across the board for \$100. He's sure she's a winner."

"I hope he doesn't bet that much every day," LN remarked after Margaret Jean replaced the receiver.

Margaret Jean laughed. "No, he's not that addicted. But he does fancy himself a good judge of horseflesh." She tossed back her head and laughed. "This nag will probably finish a strong fourth."

"Do you function regularly as his bookie?" LN asked.

Margaret Jean laughed.

"If you do," LN said, "maybe, we could raise the money for the library that way." Then, she laughed, too.

"I should be getting back downtown," Margaret Jean said.

"Stay here," LN coaxed. "Come home with me for dinner. You'd get back to your office just in time to close."

Margaret Jean hesitated. "I suppose I could stay," she said. Impulsively, she picked up the phone again. "I'll call Sue Ann and tell her to lock up."

"When is Alan coming back from Chicago?" LN asked.

"Tomorrow," Margaret Jean replied. "Late tomorrow."

The phone rang. LN answered. "Hey, Brax. How are you?"

"Want a ride home?" Southgate's voice was deep and friendly.

"I'll be leaving shortly. Since you came with me this morning, I thought I'd better give you a ring."

"My gosh! Is it that late?" LN said in surprise. Quickly, she added, "The answer is yes."

"Wait there. I'll drop by."

LN's voice was calm again. "You can meet Margaret Jean."

"See you soon."

LN hung up the phone. "We've been so busy I almost missed our ride."

"I could always call Mr. Axelbank's chauffeur," Margaret Jean said. "He offered to pick me up again."

It was just a hop, skip and a jump from Southgate's office in Old Main to the library. Only five minutes elapsed before Southgate appeared at the door of LN's office.

"Come in, Brax. Meet Margaret Jean Tracy, Alan Axelbank's private secretary."

Southgate smiled. "Hello, Margaret Jean. It's nice to know you."

"Thank you."

LN continued, "Margaret Jean, this is Braxton Southgate, Delta's most distinguished professor of law."

Margaret Jean's eyes sparkled. "This is a pleasure," she said.

Southgate eyed the boxes under the window. "More Presley memorabilia?" he asked pointing to the bulging cartons. "All of this stuff will force you out of here soon, LN."

"Those are unpublished songs fans sent Elvis hoping he'd sing them. I think they're important," LN replied, her voice a bit haughty.

Southgate let out a low whistle. "There must be several hundred of them."

"I doubt that this is all of them," LN remarked. "We'll probably never find them all."

Southgate picked up one and studied it. "I never realized there were so many amateur song writers," he said. He put the song back and turned to LN. "Shall we go?"

"We're ready," LN said. At the door she flicked off the light switch and the fluorescent tubes in the office ceiling darkened. She pulled the door shut and twisted the knob to make sure it was locked.

The trio started up the stairs. "Can you stay for dinner, Brax?" LN asked. "Margaret Jean is coming."

Southgate hesitated. "I've time for a drink," he said finally. "But I've work to do at home. I'll take a rain check on the dinner though."

"Fair enough," LN replied. Then, she stared him right in the eye. "Another errand?" she asked.

Southgate's face flushed. They reached his convertible. "I'll sit in the middle," Margaret Jean volunteered, sliding across the seat.

Southgate climbed behind the wheel. "This car's good for another twenty years," he said. "Everytime I start it, the engine just purrs."

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Thirteen

LN's remark about another errand worried Southgate. He'd begged off staying for dinner with her and Margaret Jean in order to find out more about the Trimbles. One minute he suspected she'd caught on to his actions, the next he was sure he'd done absolutely nothing that could make her suspicious.

Still, he sought reassurance and decided to give Togo a ring on the phone, which his new co-conspirator answered immediately. "Hey, Togo," Southgate said. "How are things going?"

"No problems yet," Togo answered.

"I just dropped off LN and she made a flip comment about my going off on another errand. Do you think she suspects something?"

Togo was silent a moment, then said, "I doubt it. I haven't seen her for a couple of days, so I'm no last minute expert, but I don't see how she can know a thing. Chalk it up to coincidence."

"Well, I'm working on that house on Dolan street. The criss-cross lists the occupants as Glenn and Myrtle Trimble. I skipped dinner with LN to give them a call. Her remark really hit home."

"I'm not going to worry about it," Togo said.

"Okah," answered Southgate. "Me either. I'll talk to you later."

"Check," Togo said and hung up.

Southgate took the yellow legal pad from his briefcase and put it on his desk next to the telephone. He punched out the number 578 0943. A woman answered after three rings.

"Hello, Mrs. Myrtle Trimble?" Southgate asked.

"Yes. This is Mrs. Trimble."

"Good evening," Southgate read from the pad. "I'm calling from Family Opinions, Inc., we're a nationwide marketing research firm in New York City. We're conducting a survey tonight on cooking and would like to ask you a few questions. Are you the female head of the household, Mrs. Trimble?"

"Why, yes I am."

"And do you regularly do the family grocery shopping?"

"Yes, I do."

"Mrs. Trimble does anyone in your household work for an advertising agency, a market research firm or a firm engaged in the manufacturing, sale or distribution of food products?"

"No, my husband and I are retired."

Southgate's interest heightened. She was cooperating with him. He began to settle down, like a sportsman who knows the fish is firmly on the hook and now the task is to reel it in.

"Mrs. Trimble, for classification purposes only: Are you Spanish? Caucasian? Black? Oriental? Or other? He paused, then explained, "like an American Indian."

"I'm white."

"I'm going to read you various age groupings. Please tell me to which one you belong. Under 21? 21 to 34? 35 to 49? 50 to 64? over 65?"

Mrs. Trimble laughed. "Why, I'm 67. The same age as my husband."

"Have you, or has anyone in your family, participated in a research study in the past six months?"

"No. I've never been called before. I've read and heard about opinion polls all of my life. But no one ever asked me a thing until you. Frankly, I thought they were made up." She paused, then laughed again. "You mean all those women on TV really use those soaps?"

"Mrs. Trimble, it's all very scientific," Southgate responded. "You're one of 350 housewives we're calling at random in this one survey on cooking. Your answers are highly valued. Let me read you some numbers now and you tell me which one best describes the number of persons in your household. One? Two? Three? Four? Five? Six or more?"

"Two. There's just Glenn, my husband, and me. We never had children."

"Do you rent? Own your home? Live with relatives?"

"We're owners. My husband is a retired electrical engineer."

"Mrs. Trimble, I was just going to read off some job categories. I'll skip those now. Tell me, do you ever marinate meat, fish or poultry?"

"Yes."

"How often? Once a week? Twice a month? Once every six months? Once a year or less?"

Mrs. Trimble thought for a few seconds. "I'd say twice a month."

"Do you buy the marinade or do you make your own?"

"I buy it. Shopping gives me and my husband a chance to get out. We enjoy driving. We go to the store almost every day."

"Mrs. Trimble what brand do you buy?"

There was a pause. "It's not Kitchen Cook. I don't like that. Let's see. Most of the time it's Mr. Sauce."

"Let me read you some names. You tell me if you've heard of any of them."

"Chef's Delight?"

"No."

"Sauce Ten?"



"No."

"Thrifty Sauce?"

"I've heard of that."

"Do you think you ever might buy it? Probably will buy it? Probably won't buy it? Will never buy it?"

"I might try it sometime."

"We need a rough idea of your total household income before taxes, Mrs. Trimble. Is it: under \$10,000? \$10,000 to \$14,999? \$15,000 to \$19,999? \$20,000 to \$24,999? \$25,000 to \$29,999? \$30,000 to \$34,999? \$35,000 or more?"

"Do I have to answer that?"

"It would help the survey if you did."

"Well," She paused. "\$20,000 to \$24,000."

"Mrs. Trimble, we sell nothing and you will receive no solicitations as a result of this call. For verifications purposes only, do you mind telling me your street address and city?"

"1463 Dolan drive, Memphis, Tennessee."

"Thank you very much for talking to us. Your answers are very helpful. Have a nice evening ~~now~~."

Southgate hung up. "Bingo," he said to himself.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Fourteen

A few minutes after five o'clock, LN paused at the entrance to the Skyway atop the Peabody hotel in downtown Memphis. The maitre d' stood beside the lectern holding his reservations book. He put down his pencil and came forward. "May I help you?" he asked.

LN's eyes swept the room. Here and there, couples sat having early cocktails. The tinkling strains of Stardust came from a piano tucked away in a far corner. "A table, please," she said.

"For one?"

"No. Two. I'll be joined by Mr. Axelbank shortly."

"You're Miss Gladfelter?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Axelbank phoned. He'll be a few minutes late. He asked me to apologize." The black tied maitre d' stepped off. "This way, please."

A fine mist had settled in after a day in which gray, low hanging clouds had played hide and seek with the sun up and down the river valley. Small, round drops of moisture already clung to the outside glass as LN was escorted to a white clothed table a few feet from the windows that circled the room. Overhead, twinkling lights studded the ceiling.

It was darkening early. A good time, LN thought, to be inside. The atmosphere in the room was pleasant and relaxed. As she looked through the wet panes, LN felt as if she were snugly encased in a warm, dry, see-through capsule surrounded by damp, alien vapors. She recalled, with a smile, that it was the kind of day that Southgate insisted was created to cuddle up with a bottle and a blonde.

"Would you like a drink while you wait?" the maitre d' asked.

"Yes, I believe I will."

The maitre d' turned and silently summoned a waiter, who hurried to the table. "Yes, madam?"

LN smiled. "I'd like an old fashioned, please."

The waiter turned and left with a brisk step. Shortly, he returned with a small bowl of salted nuts, followed moments later by the drink. LN lifted her glass, moistened the brim with her lips, then took a sip. Just then, Axelbank appeared. LN watched while he shook hands at the door with the maitre d', who, in turn, gestured toward her table.

The two men marched forward, the maitre d' in the lead, Axelbank following.

"I'm sorry I'm late, my dear," he apologized when he reached her. But he offered no further explanation.

As he sat down opposite her, the maitre d' asked, "The usual, Mr. Axelbank?"

"Yes, Karl, thank you."

LN ran a finger around the rim of her glass. "You don't need to apologize," she said when the maitre d' had gone. "I've only been here a few minutes myself."

Axelbank smiled. "Well, I'm sorry." Then, he changed the subject. "This is a delightful room," he said, "one of my favorites."

"This is my first visit since the renovation," LN remarked, looking around again. "Do you think the revival will take hold?"

"The Peabody is one of the famed landmarks of the mid-south," Axelbank responded. "And mid-town hotels are popular again."

The Skyway was becoming crowded now. "People do seem to be getting out more," LN commented. Axelbank's martini arrived. LN took another sip of her old fashioned and they chatted, in an easy, rambling conversation about the weather, Gershon Wingo's paintings and Axelbanks's journey to Chicago.

The trip was a success, he said, but he didn't go into detail.

The waiter reappeared. "Ready for another drink?" he asked. Axelbank gathered up a handful of salted nuts. "Yes, another round," he said.

"I don't hold my liquor very well," LN said.

"Nonsense," Axelbank replied.

"No, I'm serious."

"Well, you know what Ogden Nash wrote, 'Candy's dandy but liquor's quicker.'"

LN laughed, hoping to cover her blush. "I get fuzzy tongued if I drink too much," she explained.

When's he going to mention the library, LN thought. She wanted a clear head when he did, so she nursed her second drink when it came. She was dying to talk about the library but hesitated to broach the subject first.

"How are the fan clubs doing, Alan?" she asked.

"Better than ever before," he replied. "Just today, two more were chartered. One in Hong Kong, the other in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Everyone of them wants to make a pilgrimage to Memphis, of course."

This time LN couldn't resist. "A library would be an ideal stop for them," she said.

"Or a museum," Axelbank put in. There was a hint of rejection in his voice.

LN suddenly felt vulnerable. She had a feeling that Margaret Jean handled him much better than she did. He was always slipping and sliding away from LN. "What do you mean, a museum?"

"A museum that has an admission price. We could make money on that."

"That's crass," LN countered.

Axelbank laughed. "Of course."

"Alan, I need your help with the library."

"I'm sorry, my dear, but I'm turning you down."

"If you don't want to make a personal donation, you could make one on behalf of the fan clubs. The members would be happy about that."

Axelbank's gaze was penetrating. "Perhaps. But I'm still not going to do it."

"Did you ask me here just to tell me this?"

Axelbank scrunched up his eyebrows. "I thought it would be a nice place for you to drown your sorrow."

"Well, I don't feel like getting wet." LN rose regally from her chair. "Good night, Alan."

Axelbank's eyes focused on something an indefinite distance away. "I suppose this means you aren't going to the derby," he said.

LN's eyes narrowed. Her cheeks colored. Her jaw took on a firm, hard line. "You bet your ass it does," she replied.

When she stepped from the elevator into the lobby, a duck waddled past. Others were swimming, as usual, in the fountain nearby. "That's what he's doing," LN muttered to herself, "He's ducking out on me." She felt crushed, her dream of the library seemingly farther away than ever. She walked dejectedly to get her car.

Outside, on the new, red brick sidewalk, laid in a herringbone pattern, LN paused, then went back inside and asked the bell captain the location of a telephone. When he pointed across the lobby, LN rummaged in her purse for change.

A tear in the corner of one eye, she dialed and heard the phone ring once, then again. Her heartbeat quickened, the more she thought about Axelbank, the angrier she became.

"Hello," said Southgate's voice.

"Hey, Brax, are you busy?"

"Well, hi, honey." He paused. "Am I busy, you ask. It depends. "Why? What's up?"

LN took a deep breath. "Axelbank just turned me down on a donation to the library." She suppressed a snuffle. "I feel just awful."

"Where are you now?"

"At the Peabody. We were having a drink in the Skyway. He asked me up there just to tell me."

"Do you have your car?"

"Yes."

"And you're all dressed up, looking beautiful, and no place to go.?"

LN laughed. "Oh, Brax, don't tease me."

"I'm not. Listen. Meet me at Paulette's. It's about half way between us." He paused. "I'll see you there in half an hour. A good meal will do wonders for you."

She hesitated. "Brax, I'm imposing upon you."

"No, you're not. See you."

The receiver clicked. LN wiped her eye and walked outside again. This time she gave her parking coupon to the doorman and waited for her car to arrive.

Southgate called the restaurant, made a reservation, then took a quick shower and dressed in a lightweight gray suit with narrow pin-stripes.



Twenty minutes later he pulled into the parking lot behind Paulette's in Overton Square, an entertainment area two and one-half miles west of his house and about three miles east of the Peabody. He spotted LN's Triumph and hurried inside to the European atmosphere of the restaurant with its brown wooden beams and white rough plaster walls.

He found LN seated on a long, wooden bench facing the bar. Her face was wan. "Don't look so sad," he consoled. "It's not the end of the world."

She managed a weak smile. "It feels like it."

A hostess modishly dressed in a high necked white blouse and a long brown skirt approached Southgate. After checking off his reservation, she led the couple through rows of other diners to a quiet corner table.

"Do you feel like a drink?" Southgate asked LN after they were seated.

"Do I! Driving out here I was shaking all over I was so mad. He's just what I called him several weeks ago- an old fakir. He's Midas and Croesus combined." LN gritted her teeth. Her eyes flashed. In a determined voice, she vowed, "I'm going to get even with him."

Southgate smiled. "Let's have a drink first," he said. "Then, I have an idea."

"I'll stick with an old fashioned," LN said. "That's what I had at the Skyway." Her eyes softened. "Brax, that's a beautiful place; even tonight, with the low drifting clouds. I felt I could reach out through the windows and touch them."

Southgate nodded. "We'll have to go there from time to time," he said.

Their drinks came. This time, as soon as the waiter set her glass on the table, LN took a good belt of her old fashioned. "For my nerves," she said ruefully.

"Would you like menus now?" the waiter asked.

Southgate looked at LN, who nodded. "I'm famished," she said.

The waiter opened the menus and handed one to LN and the other to Southgate. "For madam may I suggest our special tonight, beef brochettes, with pieces of mushrooms, onions and green pepper marinated in wine."

LN glanced at Southgate and moved the tip of her tongue smoothly along her upper lip. "Hmmm. That sounds good." Southgate nodded. "I'll take that," she said.

"And you, monsieur?"

"The same."

"What kind of dressing would you like on your salad? We have French, Roquefort, Thousand Island and oil and vinegar."

"Roquefort, please," LN said.

"Make mine French," Southgate directed.

"Would you like coffee with dinner or later?"

Southgate glanced at LN, who winked at him and said nothing. "Later," he said.

By the time their drinks were finished, the salads had arrived, followed shortly by the entree.

"This is good," LN remarked after a couple of bites.

"It's excellent," Southgate agreed.

They talked about the food and the restaurant as they ate. It wasn't until they were ready for coffee that they returned to a discussion of the library.

"Well, Brax, where do I go from here?" LN asked.

Southgate poured a dollop of cream. "Just one day at a time," he said. "You'll get your library."

"I could go directly to the fans." She paused, then said expectantly, "You said earlier that you had an idea."

Southgate stirred his coffee aimlessly for a few moments while he pondered the seed money he needed. LN could provide it with money from her modest family trust. He'd hurried to the restaurant believing she was in the right frame of mind to accept his scheme and he was prepared to propose that she use her share of the money to build the library.

Now, he hesitated, suddenly afraid she would be a harder sell than Togo and also undecided over how much to tell her. Togo had assented because he needed money while Southgate's own motives were kindled by both the money and his desire to discredit Weber. LN shared neither need. Her dream was the library.

"Yes," he said finally. "I have an alternative."

LN took a sip of her coffee. As she held the cup to her lips, she gazed at Southgate over its rim. "You sound so secretive," she said. "First, unexplained errands. Now cautious words."

Southgate took a deep breath and said, "You know how I feel about Weber."

"Sure. He's been a thorn in your side for years. Now he might be governor."

"Right." Southgate leaned forward. His voice became a whisper. "You'll keep this just between us?" he asked. LN nodded, her face solemn.

"I have to stop him. A lot more than my personal feelings are involved now." He paused as his talks with John Parron flashed through his mind. He didn't want to mention the name of his former student so he said, "I have reports that he's associating with organized gamblers. That's hardly a recommendation for the state house."

"So, what can you do about it? He wouldn't be the first crooked politician."

"No. But I have a plan that would derail him and it can also help you build your library."

LN's eyes widened. "What is it?" she asked, her face animated.

Southgate saw her excitement and was pleased with his progress.

"It won't be easy but it can be done," he continued enthusiastically. "It's a crime..." Before he could go on, LN gasped. Southgate held up his hand. "...that isn't a crime."

"How can you have it both ways?" LN asked, skeptically arching an eyebrow.

"On the surface it will seem to be a crime, one sensational enough for Weber to stick his big nose in and insist on trying to solve it." A concerned look covered LN's face. Southgate saw it and explained hastily, "no one will get hurt and the only money that changes hands will be voluntarily."

"Money?" LN asked. "What money?"

Southgate reached across the table and took her hand. "This will be a multi-million dollar operation, doll," he said, his voice almost a whisper again.

LN took a deep breath.

"It involves Elvis," Southgate went on. LN's head snapped back. "Elvis? How can it involve Elvis?"

Southgate sensed her resistance and realized it wasn't going to be as easy as he'd hoped. His voice became stronger. "Elvis can help us. I want to use him, maybe borrow him is the way to put it, to focus attention on Weber."

"How?" she asked, her eyes narrowing. Southgate sought to ease her mind. "Now, LN, you know I wouldn't do anything to hurt Elvis. Togo and I want to tunnel into his tomb. We'll take the casket out..." He leaned back, relieved. He felt better letting her know that it just wasn't himself in the deal.

But he got no further as she blurted out, "Brax, that's monstrous." She stared straight at him, her eyes intense. "Why are you telling me this?"

"We can use your help. For one thing, we need some money to get started. And, as I said, it'll help you with the library."

"How about Elvis? she protested. "Don't you think of him?"

Southgate sighed. "Of course. But Togo and I figure he'd be the first to admire a scam like this. He'd enjoy it.

"Prove it."

Southgate hesitated. "Well, I don't know if I can prove it," he said. "It's just the way I feel."

"Prove it and I'll take part. Otherwise, no." Her eyes dulled. "You make it sound so simple."

"No, it's not simple." Quickly, he filled her in on the additional details, including selling the story and the two minutes of air time, then concluded, "so, the stakes are tremendous. And think of Togo. The money would free him forever from his burden of supporting those kids."

"O.K., so there are worthwhile goals- Togo's financial independence, the library and squashing Weber's political career. For those, I admit it's tempting."

"I knew you'd join us."

LN laughed. "I didn't say that." She paused. "I'll think about it. If it were just someone else, not Elvis."

"I still say he'd get a big laugh out of it."

Just then, the waiter reappeared, making it inopportune for their discussion to continue. LN's participation remained unsettled. Southgate, disappointed, slumped back in his chair again while LN gazed into space.

"More coffee?" the waiter asked.

"I'll take the check, please," Southgate said. When the waiter returned, LN glanced at her watch. "It's late, Brax, but I do feel better. Let's talk about it later."

As he drove home, Southgate sighed. LN was going to be harder to bring around than he'd hoped. Moreover, asking her for money had put another strain on their relationship. He realized, that win

147b

or lose the contest with Weber, he and LN had just about reached a parting of the ways.

By next morning, a west wind had swept across the flat Arkansas landscape into Memphis and blown the rain clouds farther east.



The day was sunny as Southgate rounded the corner of Old Main from the parking lot and nearly collided with LN jogging along with Elvie at her heels.

"Did you watch the Today show?" he asked with a grin.

"No."

"Someone bought Elvis' 1971 Detomaso Pantera for \$300,000 in diamonds."

"Who?"

"An unidentified man. It was at an auction for car collectors in Houston. They said the car featured several bullet holes and that it came with documents to prove that Elvis shot at it one morning when it wouldn't start." Southgate winked. "Maybe Axelbank bought it."

"You bastard," she groaned. She slipped the earphone back on and took several strides. Then she turned. "You might get me yet," she said. "Keep trying."

\*\*\*\* \* \*\*\*\*

## Chapter Fifteen

The bell atop Old Main had heralded the end of morning classes when Southgate poked his head in the faculty lounge just before noon. A number of professors had congregated there, some talking in small groups, some sitting alone reading. Togo stood by himself on the far side of the room. He motioned Southgate over.

"Can you come to my house tonight?" Togo inquired. "I've something to show you."

"Any special time?" Southgate asked.

"Say eight o'clock."

"I'll be there." They fell silent for a time, then Southgate continued the conversation. "Have you seen LN? She hopping mad. Alan Axelbank refused to donate to the Presley library."

"Was he her last hope?"

Southgate drew a short breath. "No. We are. I talked to her last night about helping us."

Togo's eyes brightened. "Did she agree?"

"Not yet. She needs to be convinced Elvis doesn't care." Togo looked askance at his cohort. Both men laughed simultaneously at the absurdity of Southgate's words. "I know how that sounds," Southgate added quickly. "But it's a very real problem. Somehow, we have to solve it. She would be a great help, especially with money."

Togo shook his head. "I wish I had a solution for us."

"Let's hope we think of something," Southgate said. He didn't tell Togo he'd pondered the dilemma all morning and come up empty. In fact, he'd thought about it constantly since dining with LN last night at Paulette's. Perhaps because he'd found no ready solution, he thought LN was being extremely difficult.

"I've got to run," Togo said. "I'll see you tonight."

"Check," Southgate replied. He tarried a few moments, then stepped into the hall. As he walked along, he began to hum. Suddenly, he stopped in his tracks. He thought of the two boxes of unpublished songs in LN's office. She'd begun to examine and sort them. Each day she planned to finish at least a dozen, studying the meaning of the words and Elvis' comments about them. That's how he decided to convince her. He'd write a song with words and comments by Elvis to fit the occasion. Hindsight, he thought, will work wonders.

Southgate heard the twang of Togo's guitar as he stepped up on the porch of his house. He'd taken advantage of the weather and walked over from his own townhouse just a few blocks away. It was another of those soft southern spring nights, when the temperature was warm and pleasant but the oppressive humidity that hung over the river valley in the summertime hadn't arrived yet.

Southgate began to hum. It was a familiar tune, one of those songs of Togo's native Texas that he played so often.

"The yellow rose of Texas," Southgate sang. "The only one for me."

Togo was a versatile musician. He read music and also played the piano, although the guitar was his favorite. Togo and LN often sat for hours, Togo strumming his guitar and LN singing in a throaty voice. She didn't have unlimited range but her pitch was good. Southgate would join in with his untrained tenor on the songs he knew.

"Well, you're punctual," Togo called through the screen door. He'd put the guitar aside to answer Southgate's knock. "Come on in."

Southgate pulled the door open and stepped inside. "Sorry to interrupt your song," he said.

"Just relaxing until you got here," Togo replied. He motioned Southgate forward with his hand. "Come on. Let's go back to my workshop."

Southgate followed him down a long hall and through the kitchen. Togo reached inside a doorway and flicked a light switch. The old storage room, which before the advent of freezers had been used to stock canned fruits and vegetables, sprang to life. Here Togo tinkered with any number of things from polishing rocks to rebuilding hi-fi sets.

Togo walked over to a wooden bench and pointed to a model on it. "Well, here's our tunnel in miniature," he said. "Want to crawl in?"

Southgate laughed. "It needs to be a bit bigger."

"Or you a little smaller," Togo retorted.

"Maybe we could hire some midgets from Ringling Brothers," Southgate quipped.

Togo shook his head. "It looks like a toy but it does give us some prospective of what lies ahead for us," he said. "Engineers have used models for hundreds of years. Why not us? By the way, this one's scaled to three-eighths inch for each foot."

Southgate became serious and examined the model. It separated in the middle to give a cross section lengthwise of the interior of both the tunnel and the gravesite. The model was painstakingly tinted in several colors. The tunnel walls were brownish. Within the grave site were four small white vaults. Above them, intricate in their detail, were the markers, the Greek columns, the fountains and walks that visitors saw every day. The basement of the house at the other end was one large room.

"This is fantastic, Togo," Southgate exclaimed. He measured the height of the tunnel with his thumb and forefinger, then held it out in front of him. "How does this translate into reality?" he asked.

"The real tunnel would be five feet high and four feet wide," Togo explained. "That's big enough to get us into the chamber here." He pointed to the larger opening in front of the vaults. "I figure a chamber eight feet by ten feet and six feet high will be large enough for us. Of course, its roof is going to be fairly close to the surface." Togo looked Southgate in the eye. "We'll be moving about 120 tons of dirt," he said.

"Jesus. That's a lot of dirt," Southgate said excitedly. He became quite animated. "How many dump trucks is that?"

"Oh, five or six."

"Can we handle that much dirt?"

"Depends on how we do it," Togo replied. He laughed good naturedly. Dump trucks pulling in and out of the driveway to a house might arouse more interest than we want," The smile left and he became soberfaced. "If the basement is eight feet high, we'd need a floor space fifteen feet by twenty feet to pile up that much dirt. That's not unreasonable space for a basement." Togo drew a short breath. "There's another possibility," he said. "We could use a hydraulic lance."

Southgate looked at Togo attentively. "What's that," he asked.

"As far as digging goes, it sure would beat picks and shovels. The soil is weak enough for some type of hydraulic tunneling."

"It really sounds sophisticated."

"Brax, I think we can use a high pressure stream of water to cut the outer shape of the tunnel and dissect it into cross sections which simply fall to the floor. We'll pulverize those sections into tiny grains with a wash hose and scoop them up with a rubber suction hose."

"What kind of earth will we be working with?" Southgate asked.

"Loess," Togo said.

Southgate looked at him expectantly. But Togo didn't continue.

"What's that mean in English," Southgate asked finally.

Togo threw back his head and howled. "You, a lawyer, asking me what something means in English."

Southgate's face reddened. "I'm not much on geology, Togo," he said. "As for the language of laws. You know I've advocated change for years."

"Okah," Togo said. "Okah. I just couldn't resist needling you on that one." He paused for a moment, then continued. "Loess is finely grained silt or clay. It was blown onto the bluffs and hills of Memphis during the late glacial times. We'll probably also encounter some sand, a little chalk and gravel."

"How about rock formations? Any danger of those?"

Togo shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe. There're some localized outcroppings around the area. But it's very hit and miss. Basically, there're no rock formations of any size around Memphis above what's called the paleozoic layer, 3,000 feet down. That's where the bedrock limestone starts."

Southgate's mind was too curious. "What's the paleozoic layer?" he asked.

"It's older than both of us put together," Togo said, shaking his head. "It goes back 330 million to 500 million years ago. The loess we'll be digging in is Johnny-come-lately stuff. Some of it might go back a couple of million years. But most of it is probably only tens of thousands of years old."

"We could encounter rock though?" Southgate asked.

"Yeah, it's possible," Togo answered. "If we do, it'll be anything from a crust an inch or two thick to a section two or three feet wide. Even with that, we'd have no problems if we use pressurized water for cutting." Togo pointed to the model. "See how the tunnel floor rises as it moves up from the basement to the grave. That's a natural incline because of the little hill Graceland is on. The water will run right down and out of the tunnel into the basement."



"God, we can't flood the basement," Southgate said, a concerned look on his face.

Togo laughed good naturedly again. "Relax," he said. "We won't. The carry-off will be through a suction hose. If the drain won't take it directly, we'll put up a fiber glass holding tank in the basement. From the holding tank, we'll feed it slowly into the sewer. We can't do this all in one night, of course. But over a period of time, it should work."

"Can just the two of us operate your hydraulic lance?"

"I think so. It's hand operated. The pressurized water is discharged through a small opening. The lance emits a well-defined stream." Togo waved his arms in the air. "Boy, that stream will make mincemeat of the loess."

A perplexed tone entered Southgate's voice. "But, where in the hell will we get a hydraulic lance?"

Togo's face broke into a wide smile. "From good old Delta," he said. "I can use it in a lab course. My department budget has got a little fat in it," Togo confessed. "No one will question me. If we get the house, a lance can be flown here in a day or two."

"I don't know, Togo, Isn't it too complicated for only two of us. How about the water run-off? We can't suck it all up at once."

"True. So, we put in a row of sandbags across the tunnel floor several feet behind us to hold the water in a small puddle. The suction hose takes the water from the puddle."

Southgate gazed at the model. "You talk about lances, wash water and suction hoses. Aren't we going to need some pumps?"

"A couple. One to supply the water pressure for cutting, another to run the suction to remove the muck. They'll be small enough to assemble in the basement. If we bring in our supplies a little at a time over several nights, no one will suspect a thing."

"How about noise?" Southgate asked.

"I think it will be in a normal range. But I can't be sure until we test everything. It seems to me that if we keep the windows and doors closed, the noise will be confined to the basement. As I said, these aren't giant pumps. And no one will be around above ground except ourselves. We'll be digging through private property. And it wouldn't make any difference when we work. It's all underground. We don't even need daylight."

"What'll we use, miner's lamps?"

Togo laughed. "Maybe. But I think it would be a simple enough operation to run some wiring for lights and ventilation. We'll have to bring in a couple of fans. But this isn't a big tunnel. Maybe, a floor fan at the entrance will be all we need."

157a

"That's a lot of electricity. We don't want to get electrocuted."

"Not to worry, old buddy. We'll use a shock detector. That'll cut off the juice in one-half a second if there should be a short. A good one detects leaks as small as five or six milliamps- not enough to hurt a person."

"How'll we string the wiring?"

"There'll be shoring. We can afix wiring to that."

Southgate smiled. "Well, Togo," he said, "I'm eager to give it a try." He stuck out his hand and Togo grasped it firmly.

As they walked back through the kitchen, Southgate half turned toward Togo. "I might have a way to convince LN to join us," he said. "She's discovered a couple of boxes of unpublished songs sent to Elvis. I thought we could slip in an appropriate one of our own that he praised. If I wrote some words, could you put them to music."

"Why not?" Togo asked.

Southgate pulled a scrap of paper from his pocket. "What do you think of these as starters?" He handed the slip to Togo, who unfolded it and read:

TAKE MY BODY

Take my body,  
Take my soul,  
Take my body with the rock 'n roll.

Togo gave the slip of paper back to Southgate. "Keep goin'," he said.

Southgate refolded the paper and put it back in his pocket.

"Would you like a cup of coffee?" Togo asked. "Or a beer?"

"No thanks. I'll get home and try my hand at more lyrics"

Southgate paused at the door to say good-night. Then, he hurried down the porch steps.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Sixteen

As the sound of Southgate's footsteps faded away down the sidewalk, Togo returned to his living room. Alone again in the quiet house, he lifted his guitar and picked at the strings for a melody line as he repeated the words Southgate had shown him.

He left the room and collected a soft black pencil and made a lined page of music paper. Returning, he sat down with the guitar again. A light breeze rattled the front door screen in a ghostly rhythm.

Soon, deeply absorbed in his task, Togo marked down the first notes of the melody- three Cs in a row. He hummed softly, time forgotten, remembering the notes he'd previously chosen. Then, he pressed down firmly on the paper and penciled in the next notes, an E, two more Cs and an E flat.

He picked a note, then marked it on the staff. At times, he frowned, erasing what he'd put down. Patiently, he would pluck at the strings again until he was satisfied, lift his pencil and jot down the chosen tone.

Slowly, he added more melody until the words "Take my body, Take my soul, Take my body with the rock 'n roll" were all set to music. Then, he turned to the harmony. The first measure was a C 6 chord with four beats. The second measure was an F 6 followed by an E flat diminished.

The night was cold now. Togo rose and walked into the hall to close the front door. He thought of LN and his strong feelings about her. Sarah, living so much within herself, was so different than LN. At first, Togo had been attracted to Sarah's aloofness and reserve. In turn, She'd adored his rough edges. But time had been their enemy. Slowly, the very traits that originally pulled them together, began to break them apart. It wasn't the fault of either one. They'd tried to adjust but neither of them could change.

LN, volatile and outgoing, was the opposite of Sarah. When Togo had told LN that night a few weeks ago that he'd willingly wash windows in exchange for fried chicken nightly, he was more serious than LN imagined. But LN was Southgate's love and Togo accepted the situation. If he wasn't completely satisfied, he wasn't frustrated either. He'd reached an age when he could bank the fires and be content with two close and harmonious friendships.

While he walked back into the living room, he again thought of the ~~harmony~~ for the song, and went to work on the third measure. He hoped this scheme was going to work because he wanted LN to be part of the operation. Finally, above the last two chords, a G 7 augmented and C 13 in the eighth measure, he marked in bird's eyes, the symbol which to the musician means hold as long as you want to.

He played the melody and harmony together several times. First, the beat was purposefully slow, then, it was fast. After a time, he put the guitar aside. It was after midnight. In the morning, he'd show the music to Southgate.

An hour later, Togo's phone rang. He was in a deep sleep now and groggy. Only the persistence of the bell finally aroused him and his voice was torpid as he said, "hello."

"Togo, this is Southgate," a voice said. It seemed distant.

Togo rubbed the corner of one eye. "Jesus, Brax," he answered after a pause. "It's the middle of the night."

"True enough," Southgate laughed. He was ebullient. "Pretend you're in our tunnel, then you won't know the difference."

"Oh, come on, Brax," The tone of Togo's voice begged for sympathy. Southgate ignored it. "Togo, I've finished the words to the song. I want to bring them over."

Togo was wide awake by now. "I'll put some coffee on," he said. Almost as an afterthought, he added, "I'll have the melody by the time you get here." It was said with such conviction that Southgate believed him.

"Thata boy," Southgate replied.

The wafting vapors of coffee brewing teased Southgate's nostrils as he entered the front door of Togo's house for the second time in eight hours. Togo was dressed in jeans and a soft flannel shirt. Small curls of steam rose from the liquid in the cup in his hand. Like Southgate, he needed a shave.

"A little picker upper," he smiled, blowing on the cup. "Want some?"

In the kitchen, Southgate poured himself coffee and put the cup on the table. "Think I'll let it cool off a little," he said. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a piece of white paper. "Here're the words," he said, handing the paper to Togo. Despite the hour, Southgate's eyes danced with excitement.



The room was quiet. As Togo read, Southgate studied his face for a reaction. Finally, Togo looked up and smiled. "They're good. Let's use them. They sound authentic." He winked at his friend. "Sure you weren't writing back in the '60s."

"Well, for what they set out to do, I think those words are O.K.," Southgate said.

"Let me get my guitar," said Togo. When he returned he had a sheet of paper with him.

Southgate took a sip of his coffee. "Can you put them to music?" he asked.

"Hopefully, it's done," Togo answered. "I worked out both a melody and the harmony last night after you left based on the three lines you showed me. I'd just been asleep an hour or so when you called."

"I knew you weren't kidding when you said you'd have the melody ready when I got here," Southgate said. He drew a short breath. "Let's hear it then."

Togo took a couple of practice strums on his guitar. He was standing with one foot on the seat cover of a maple kitchen chair, the music on the table. He went over it a few times, then turned to Southgate. "Let me have the words again,"

Southgate handed him the piece of paper. Togo placed it on the table beside the music and read the words over several times. Then, he hummed them and, a short time later, sang them for the first time.

Take my body  
Take my soul  
Take my body with the rock 'n roll

Take my body  
Take control  
Take my body and make me whole

Take it all, take it all, take it  
Shake it all, shake it all, shake it

Take my body  
Take my soul  
Take my body with the rock 'n roll.

Southgate began to sing with him. Togo picked up the melody on the guitar, then ran through it again, adding the harmony. He played it over several more times, making slight variations. Then, looking sideways at Southgate, he said, "I think it's ready."

Togo leaned his guitar against a cabinet. They talked softly, seemingly conscious of the stillness around them. "Shall I put the words on the music sheet?" Southgate asked.

Togo nodded. "I'd type them in. Let's go in the den and use my typewriter."

Southgate followed him down the hall. "Should we give LN the original or make a Xerox?" Southgate asked. "I'm going to ~~make-up~~ a few comments by Elvis in the margins. I thought I'd print those."

"A prudent songwriter would probably send a copy," Togo said. "We can make one in the morning. Then put your comments on that."

A floorboard creaked. Southgate laughed. "It's the right hour to work on a conspiracy," he joked. Togo smiled and rubbed a finger lightly over the bluish circles under his eyes.

"I'm glad you don't write songs everyday," he said.

After Southgate finished typing in the lyrics, Togo took the sheet and completed the music. As he put down the pencil, he said, "Let's have some breakfast, then get some shut-eye."

"Good idea," Southgate responded. He looked at his watch. It was four forty-five.

The eggs splattered in the Teflon frying pan. Togo broke the yokes on both of them and shook the spatula lightly underneath. Southgate turned over the bacon strips in the frying pan on the next burner. Orange juice was already on the table.

Just then, the toaster popped up. Southgate turned away from the stove and buttered the toast. "This is really going to hit the spot," he said.

"Have you thought about the comments you're going to scrawl across the song?" Togo asked.

"Some. They'll have to be a mixture of professional observations and personal remarks." Southgate continued after a pause, "I hope this works."

Togo flipped the eggs onto plates and put several strips of bacon beside them. "I think Elvis could really roll with this," he said. "It's sort of jazz rock. It could be hardened up by eliminating some of the passing chords." Togo pointed to the notes after the slash. "These right here," he said.

Southgate looked and nodded.

Fatigue had overcome both men and they ate in silence. When Togo finished, He rinsed his dishes and put them in the dishwasher. Southgate did the same.

"Take the kids' old bedroom," Togo said. "Let's get some sleep."

The sun was well up when they awoke. The red color it displayed when it rose over the horizon was long gone. It had transgressed through orange and was now bright yellow. in a cloudless sky.

LN changed from her jogging outfit into a dress in the locker room of the women's gym and returned to her office. Her body felt rejuvenated. She did some paperwork, then turned her attention in late morning to the two boxes of unpublished songs. Religiously, she was sifting through them, keeping a rigid schedule of completing at least a dozen a day.

She'd catalogued a half dozen when a voice whispered, "hello, may I come in?" LN glanced up from her desk to see Margaret Jean, a girlish grin on her face, standing in the doorway.

LN jumped up and ran forward, her arms outstretched, her eyes bright with the light of discovery. "How wonderful to see you," she cried out. The two women embraced in an affectionate hug.

"I came by to offer my sympathy," Margaret Jean explained. "Sometimes, Mr. Axelbank can be extremely exasperating."

"How sweet of you," LN replied.

"I tried to change his mind," Margaret Jean said. "But, he insists his decision not to donate to the library is final." She paused. For a moment, there was a flash of anger in her eyes. "He makes me so mad sometimes."

LN shook her head sadly and said, "I was really counting on him."

"I know you were," Margaret Jean answered.

The two women sat down. It was nearly noon. "I'm hoping I can take you to lunch," Margaret Jean said. "We can commiserate together."

LN's smile was quick to show her approval. "I accept," she said. She leaned forward in her chair. "I'll be just a few minutes." She pointed to the song she was working on. "I'd like to finish this one. I'll do the rest when I get back."

Margaret Jean nodded.

When they left the building a short time later, Southgate watched from down the street. The two women were busy talking to each other and paid no attention to their surroundings. After they'd driven away in Margaret Jean's black Mustang, he stepped forward again and entered the building himself.

The corridors were empty. Gershon Wingo's studio door was open, but Southgate didn't see anyone inside as he slipped past. LN's door was closed. Southgate rattled the knob, then reached in his pocket and pulled out a key. Quickly, he opened the door and eased inside the room. After closing the door quietly, he walked directly to LN's desk. He shuffled carefully through the papers on top and ~~saw they were~~ unpublished songs.

She's working on them now, he thought.

He hesitated. Finally, he decided to slip his song in the stack on her desk rather than one of the boxes. He snapped open his briefcase and removed the music sheet. He picked up the two songs on top of the pile and inserted his under them.

The lid of his briefcase fell shut. Southgate jumped. A charge of adrenalin surged through his body. He listened to his heart beat in the stillness, then swept the room with his eyes. The closed briefcase caught his glance. Southgate chortled to himself and relaxed again.

He'd have to get used to facing the unexpected, he thought.

He snapped the catches shut on the briefcase. Inside the door, he paused and listened for several moments for signs of people in the hall. Convinced it was unoccupied, he opened the door a crack and slipped through. With one smooth motion, he pulled the door closed, then twisted the knob to make sure it was locked again.

Southgate exited the building without incident. The anxiousness he'd felt upon entering faded away. The key had been a stroke of luck, he thought. LN had given it to him once to pick up some papers from her office when she had the flu. She'd insisted he keep it in case a similiar situation arose again.

By the time LN returned, Southgate had been back in his own office in Old Main for more than an hour. Margaret Jean dropped her in front of the library and drove away back toward downtown and LN went right to work on the songs again.

The top two songs were routine. LN made a swift perusal of the words and a quick check for any comments by Elvis. There were none of the latter. The third song was different. She saw that immediately. Comments were scrawled across the top of the music sheet. There were more at the bottom. Limpetlike, her eyes clung to the page. She trembled with tension. This one, she knew instinctively, was different from the rest. She gazed at the title, "Take My Body," and drew a deep breath. Avidly, voraciously, she read the lyrics.

When she'd finished, she struggled to remain composed. The air seemed to vibrate around her. She began to read the comments. It seemed to her that Elvis himself was in the room. Across the top of the sheet above the music it read:

"Beautiful!" Alive or dead, we're here to help each other."

Elvis, God knows, had been no scholar, so it had been easy for Brax to imitate his cramped scribble.

Dryness tightened LN's throat. Spellbound, she stared at the page with open, unmoving eyes. She had to call Southgate. She'd challenged him to prove that Elvis would sanction tunneling into his grave and here it was right from The King himself.

LN noted the other comments on the page. On the right side, about half way down, was written: "use cut time here- 120 beats." Out to the right side of the bird's eyes was the word: "Hold."

LN sat for several minutes, hardly moving. She could feel her heart beat a steady but heightened rhythm. Finally, she reached slowly for the telephone and trance-like tapped out Southgate's office phone number. After two rings, he answered. "Brax, this is LN," she said. "Can you come over to my office?"



When Southgate arrived, LN jumped up from her chair and ran to him in the doorway.

"Oh, Brax," she exclaimed thrusting the music sheet at him. "Look at this."

Southgate took the paper and sat down. LN paced the room nervously while he read. After he'd finished he looked up at her. "This is fantastic. Let me show Togo," he exclaimed; then, "Is this proof enough for you?"

LN looked mildly shamefaced, then a wide, generous smile broke across her face. "I should never have doubted you," she said.

Southgate sat holding the sheet of music, a slight, fixed grin on his face. "No apologies are necessary," he commented magnanimously. "Better that you question the undertaking in the beginning than at the end. Now your skepticism is gone."

"It certainly is. Elvis' feeling couldn't be clearer." She reached out and took the piece of sheet music from Southgate. "It's right here , just like a road map for me."

"I assume you are going to join Togo and me?" Southgate asked.

"Of course," she replied. Her whole body throbbed with excitement.

Southgate took note of her flushed face. "You're really stimulated by this," he said.

"It's just like Elvis talked to me," she replied.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Seventeen

That night, Southgate and Togo briefed LN on the project to date. It was clear to them all that the sticking point was the lack of an entrance to the tunnel.

They'd chosen Togo's house for the meeting because the scale model was there. It rested now in the center of the kitchen table. Togo had just finished his explanation to LN.

"What do you know about the people who live in the house we want?" LN asked. She turned to face Southgate, who sat on her left. "Trimble, you said their name was."

"We know quite a lot," Southgate answered. He leaned down and pulled the information from his briefcase, which leaned against a leg of his chair.

Glancing at the yellow legal pad he used the night he'd called Mrs. Trimble, he said, "They're retired. They have no children. They live alone." He paused and studied her answers. "They're both 67. Her name is Myrtle, His is Glenn."

"Do they own the house?" LN asked.

Southgate nodded.

"We need to get them out for a while," LN sighed. "But how?"

Southgate looked first at her and then at Togo, who sat across the table from them on the other side of the model. "I've an idea on that," he said.

"Let's hear it," Togo and LN chorused.

"Suppose we made up a contest in which first prize was a month's trip to Hawaii. The winners would be the Trimbles. One of their bonuses would be bonded live-in house watchers."

"Do you think they'd fall for that?" Togo asked.

"Mrs. Trimble told me they liked to get out every chance they could. It sounded to me as if they were both healthy, vigorous people. Our hope would be, of course, that they'd grab at the trip."

"How are they fixed for money?" LN asked. "Any hint what their income is?"

"She said it was between \$20,000 and \$24,000. But that really isn't important. This would be an all-expenses paid prize. The airfare, the hotel, meals, everything."

"Who'd set it all up, Brax?" Togo put in.

"I think a travel agency would do it for us. But if we sent the hotel a cashier's check in advance covering everything we can think of for a month I think that would be sufficient. The operation has to be as tightly controlled as possible."

"Yeah, secrecy is a must," Togo said. "It's vital. We can't leave a trail for the police to pick up."

"At times, it will be dangerous for us," LN said.

They all fell silent for a moment. It was Southgate who finally spoke again. "Let's go back to the cashier's check. I could take cash and fly to St. Louis or New Orleans or Atlanta, get the check and mail it from there to the hotel in Hawaii."

"It might be more fool-proof to drive. Airline reservations can be traced," put in LN.

"Whoever goes can use an assumed name," Southgate replied.

"Whoa," Togo exclaimed. "We're ahead of ourselves. How about figuring out the contest first. And a month in Hawaii seems like a long time to me. Maybe a trip across Europe would be better."

"If they were younger, I'd say you had a point, Togo," Southgate replied. "But at their age I vote for Hawaii. We can set the trip up so they spend some time touring the islands. A month will go fast for them."

"I'm for Hawaii too," LN said. After a pause, she added, "Where are we going to get the money for this contest?"

Southgate shot a furtive glance at Togo, who dropped his eyes and stared at the top of the his kitchen table. LN glanced at him, then stared Southgate straight in the eyes, waiting for a reply.

Southgate swallowed. "We were planning on you staking us," he said finally.

LN laughed. "How much?" she asked.

"We don't have a budget," Southgate answered. "But if you could lay out the money for the Trimbles and other start up expenses it would help. You'd get it all back in the end plus a million dollars more for the library."

"It's a fair enough risk," LN said.

The two men looked at each other and together breathed sighs of relief. To begin with, they would need money for the pumps, for holding tanks, if necessary, and the shoring. Other equipment and supplies would be needed as the project progressed. Communications would require some outlay.

"You're an angel," Southgate told her.

LN blushed. "Financial or heavenly?" she quipped.

"Both," Togo said.

All three of them laughed at that.

"About the contest," Southgate said. "Suppose I draw up the details. Then, we can all go over them. I think we can move faster that way."

Togo and LN agreed. Togo rose from the table and went to a cupboard over the refrigerator, where he removed a bottle of Jack Daniels. He called to LN. "There're some liqueur glasses in the maple cabinet in the dining room. Would you get three of them?"

LN found them easily. They were in silver filigree holders. She brought them back into the kitchen with her and placed them on the table. Togo unscrewed the cap on the whiskey bottle.

"I don't have enough shot glasses for us," he said. "I thought we'd use these." He pointed to the liqueur glasses. They're about the same size."

"The silver work is beautiful," LN said.

Togo gazed at them for several moments without answering. Finally, he spoke. "Sarah and I bought them on our honeymoon in the south of Mexico. A place called Martin. Silver is cheap there." He filled each of the glasses, then raised his to eye level. "Here's to our success," he said.

LN and Southgate raised their glasses simultaneously. There was a dull clink of silver as the three vessels met over the center of the kitchen table. Below them was the model.

"To my partners," said LN. She tossed her head back and poured the whisky down her throat. In one gulp it was gone. Her eyes watered as she placed her glass back down on the table. "Boy, Togo, let's not do this too often," she said.

In the end, Southgate worked out the contest on a simple premise. He merely made it an extension of the Family Opinions, Inc. survey he'd used in the first contact with Mrs. Trimble. He telephoned her again and told her she had won a month's vacation for two in Hawaii.

"Out of all those who helped us, it was your name that was pulled out of the hat," Southgate informed Mrs. Trimble.

"Oh, my," she responded excitedly. "All that just for answering a few questions?"

"Well, you helped us. Now, we're going to do something for you."

"Glenn and I have always wanted to see Hawaii. We almost went last year. Then, there was the air controllers' strike and we decided to stay home."

Thank, God, Southgate thought. "Someone must be looking out for you, Mrs. Trimble," he said happily. "This time you'll go free."

"Glenn will like that," she said.

"Mrs. Trimble, I'd like to send our representative to see you. Her name is Jane Walters. She'll work out all the details with you."

"That's fine."

"Could I set a time now?" Southgate asked.

"Surely, when would you like us to see her?"

Southgate flipped through the calendar on his den desk. "How about next Tuesday? That's four days from now."

"What time of the day will she be here?" Mrs. Trimble asked, a note of caution in her voice. "I can't neglect my grocery shopping, you know."

"What time do you usually go shopping, Mrs. Trimble?" Southgate asked politely.

Mrs. Trimble's voice was calm again. "Mid-morning usually. Glenn always drives us."

"Well, let's make your appointment with Mrs. Walters at two o'clock. Will that give you plenty of time to shop?"

"Oh, my yes."

"Two o'clock next Tuesday it is then."

"This is such a thrill," Mrs. Trimble exclaimed. "I can hardly wait until Tuesday."



"It's only the beginning, Mrs. Trimble," Southgate said.

"Oh, I hope so."

The two said good-bye and Southgate clicked down his receiver. In an instant, it was up to his ear again and he tapped out another number. He listened to it ring a half dozen times before a breathless voice said, "hello."

"Hi, LN."

"Hey, Brax. I'm sorry I took so long to answer. I was in the shower."

"Are you wet?"

"Sort of. Can you wait a second while I get a towel?"

"Take your time."

There was silence. After a short wait, Southgate heard a rattle in his receiver, then LN's voice again. "I'm back," she said. "What's up?"

"I just talked to Mrs. Trimble. I ~~made~~ an appointment for you to see her next Tuesday at two o'clock to discuss the trip she's just won to Hawaii."

"Great."

"They're eager to go. But maybe you'd better talk to them before we make the reservation."

"O.K."

"Why don't you, Togo and I get together tonight and decide the details. I'll call him to be here at my house at eight-thirty."

"See you then."

"Check," Southgate said.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Eighteen

A very different looking LN pressed the front doorbell of the Trimble house at two o'clock on Tuesday.

Her striking ash blonde hair had been replaced by an attractive light brown wig. Curly ringlets framed her face. She wore a conservative blue tailored skirt and matching coat over a snowy white blouse. Large, pink tinted designer glasses magnified her blue eyes.

She stood patiently on the steps in the sunshine, a tan briefcase at her side, while from inside, she heard the muffled sound of chimes move laboriously through their heralded litany.

After a moment of silence, the door was opened by a white haired woman of medium build neatly dressed in skirt and sweater. "Hello," she said cheerfully. "You must be Jane Walters. Please, come in. I'm Mrs. Trimble."

"It's so nice to meet you, Mrs. Trimble," LN said.

They walked through a small foyer into a living room furnished with traditional pieces. A fireplace covered the inside wall. Through a doorway, LN saw the dining room and beyond that the kitchen. She made a mental map of the floor plan as it unfolded for her. On the other side of the foyer was a family room. A staircase rose from the entrance hall to the bedrooms above.

A closed, six paneled door was tucked under the stairwell. LN's body rippled with excitement. She guessed the door led to the basement. Somehow, before she left, LN had to see what was down there.

"What an attractive home you have, Mrs. Trimble," LN said, a touch of flattery in her voice.

"That's the one thing that worries us," Mrs. Trimble responded. "We're concerned about leaving it for a month without anyone here."

A surprised expression captured LN's face. "Why, didn't they tell you that part of the prize is a live-in house watcher? I'm going to do that for you."

Relief flooded Mrs. Trimble's eyes. "Glenn will be glad to hear that. He considered not going. A month is such a long time to leave a house unattended."

"Now you can relax," LN said. "I'll be here the entire time. You can tell me just what needs to be done."

Mrs. Trimble asked LN to sit down. "Let me get Glenn," She said. She went to the stairs and called. Upon her return, she said, "He's clearing up this month's bills."

Like his wife, Mr. Trimble had white hair. His walk was erect as he entered the room. He was a tall man with a twinkle in his eye. For sixty seven, he looked robust and fit.

"Glenn, This is Jane Walters," his wife said.

"How do you do," Mr. Trimble said, bowing his head slightly. "We're sure looking forward to our trip. It's the first thing we've ever won."

"I'm pleased to meet you," LN told him.

"Miss Walters has the best news for us, Glenn," Mrs. Trimble said. "She's going to house sit for us while we're gone."

Glenn Trimble eyed LN carefully. After a silence (which to LN seemed interminably long), he asked, "Do you have references?"

LN's heartbeat quickened. Her expression changed slightly and for a moment her mind went blank. His abruptness had unsettled her. But Mr. Trimble apparently did not notice. He lowered himself into a chair and waited.

As her senses returned, LN forced herself not to shudder. For God's sake, she thought, don't panic. Gradually a calmness crept over her and with it her wits sharpened.

"I'm bonded, Mr. Trimble. Your house and everything in it is protected for the duration of your vacation. We have to be very careful. Besides me, a security patrol will check the house frequently." LN looked first at Mr. Trimble, then his wife. "You might mention this to your neighbors so they won't be alarmed."

Mrs. Trimble nodded and smiled by way of an answer. Mr. Trimble said, "Of course, being bonded is fine. It's much more reassuring than references, really. References can always be faked."

Mrs. Trimble wiggled in her chair. "Glenn!" she exclaimed. "That's not very nice." But her husband ignored her. "You will have proof of the bonding?" he asked.

"Yes, I'll bring that along when I deliver the tickets and all the details of the trip," LN answered. She looked around the room. "Perhaps a walk through the house would be appropriate."

The Trimbles glanced at each other. "Mrytle, why don't you do that. I wasn't quite finished with my work. If we're going to be gone a month, our bills should be in order. I don't want the lights to go out on Miss Walters."

"First, you haven't mentioned when we leave," Mrs. Trimble said. "I hope it isn't tomorrow. There are some things I need to do before leaving."

"Next Tuesday morning," LN said. "A car will pick you up and take you to the airport."

Mrs. Trimble clapped her hands happily. "Oh, Glenn, isn't this exciting?"

"Mrytle, it certainly is. We're two lucky people." He turned to LN. "It was nice to have met you."

Mrs. Trimble showed LN through the house, explaining various things as she went. The basement came last. As they descended the stairs, Mrs. Trimble turned and said, "We hardly ever use the rooms down here. I don't know why we ever began to finish it off."

LN looked around, prepared to remember every detail. Seeing the basement was one of the main objectives of her trip. "Why, it's beautiful," she said. All of the walls were paneled and the ceiling was tiled. But the floor was still raw concrete and it was baren of furniture.

"We just gave up after Glenn finished the walls and ceiling," Mrs. Trimble said. "Glenn decided the floor was too much work for the little time we would spend down here."

LN noticed an outside door in one corner with stairs leading up to the backyard. That'll be handy, she thought. The top of a white fence could barely be seen through the half windows. LN turned to Mrs. Trimble. "It must be interesting sharing a fence with Graceland," she said.

Mrs. Trimble's eyes brightened. "You know, Mr. Presley was a very considerate neighbor." She giggled, then lowered her voice. "Secretly, I like his music."

"Do the tourists ever bother you?" LN asked.

"No, everything over there is very sedate and orderly." Half way up the stairs, Mrs. Trimble turned. "You know, I've never seen his grave. My, it's so close. Sometimes, especially at night, I feel spooky about it."

"But, it does make your house interesting, Mrs. Trimble,"

LN said.

Mrs. Trimble looked at LN curiously. "Why, I never thought of it that way before," she said.

\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*



## Chapter Nineteen

Forty minutes later, LN was back home. As she opened the door, Elvie scampered into the hall. He looked at her, cautiously sniffed her ankles and began to bark quizically. What he saw and what he smelled didn't match.

"Elvie," she cried out gleefully, "don't you know me?"

The dog's tail began to wag and he snuggled up to her leg. LN reached down and patted his head. As she walked forward, Elvie tagged along at her heels. The phone rang just as she reached the first step of the stairs to her bedroom.

When she picked up the receiver, it was Southgate's voice. "Hi," he said, "Togo's here. We saw you drive up just now. We'll be over. We're anxious to hear your report on the Trimble's."

"I'll leave my disguise on then," she told him.

"Good. We'd like to see you in it close up."

LN put her phone down. She went to the window and watched Togo and Southgate walk up to the door. When she opened it, they stared at her in admiration.

"Fabulous," exclaimed Southgate.

Togo added his approval with, "you could have fooled me."

LN twirled around. "It's O.K. then?"

"It's perfection," Southgate said. The two men stepped inside.

"How'd it go?" Togo asked.

"There was one brief moment when my heart almost stopped," LN answered as they walked into the living room and sat down. "Mr. Trimble began to question me closely about references. Otherwise perfect."

Southgate frowned. "What about references?" he asked, concerned.

"Did he suspect something?"

"Relax," LN reassured him. "It all worked out fine. I explained I was bonded and that their house and its contents would be fully protected against financial loss while they're gone. That calmed him."

"Everything's on track then." Togo asked.

"Everything," LN emphasized. "They leave next Tuesday."

Southgate clenched his fist upward in a triumphant gesture. "That was good thinking on your part, LN," he said in praise. "I can fix up something that looks like a bond." He turned to Togo. "Now, we can begin to lay in supplies. How about the Hydraulic lance? Can it be here by then?"

Togo nodded confidently. "I'll have everything else ready to go, too." He turned to LN. "Tell us about the basement."

LN leaned forward, her hands resting on her knees. "It's bare. They began to finish it off but stopped after putting paneling and ceiling tiles."

"No furniture?" Southgate questioned.

"None. The floors are bare concrete."

"Perfect," Southgate exclaimed. "We remove a wall panel, smash a few cinder blocks and we have an opening."

Togo asked LN for a pad and pencil. Once in hand, he drew a rough sketch of a floor plan. He pointed to the side where the tunnel would begin. "This is just plain wall?" he asked.

LN nodded.

"No windows?"

LN pointed to what would be the house's far northeast corner. "There's a door here into a stairwell that goes up outside. Everything else is paneling."

Togo glanced at Southgate. "Seems simple enough."

"Is it one big room?" Togo asked.

"No. There's a utility room in one corner. That's separate." She pointed to it's location. "But the tunnel would go ~~out~~ from the big room."

"It's made to order," Togo said turning to Southgate. He looked back at LN. "Where's the drain?"

A perplexed look crossed LN's face. Her brow wrinkled. After a moment of confused silence, she said, "I don't know. In the utility room, I suppose. I didn't see one in the big room."

"There's got to be a drain somewhere," Southgate put in. "Every basement has a drain."

"Let's hope so," Togo said uneasily.

LN shifted in her chair. "I'm not used to this wig yet," she said, scratching the headpiece.

The phone rang. LN hurried to the den and picked up the receiver. "Why, hello, Gleamer," she said. "Yes, he and Togo are both here." She laid the receiver down and walked back into the living room. "Brax, it's Gleamer. He wants to talk to you."

LN went upstairs. When Southgate reached the phone, he reached out with his foot and quietly pushed the door closed.

"Brax, you haven't forgotten Carrie have you?" the Delta president asked immediately, concern in his voice.

"I'm right on schedule, Gleamer," Southgate promised him.

"I hate to harp on it, Brax, but Boots keeps inquiring."

"I understand," Southgate replied.

"The marriage is a week from Saturday, Brax."

"I know," Southgate said kindly.

"I just don't want any slip up."

"Everything will be fine, Gleamer. I'll have the necessary papers ready in a couple of days." The two men said goodbye and Southgate dropped the phone lightly into its cradle and returned to the living room. LN was back sans wig, her ash blonde hair neatly combed. Togo gazed at her absentmindedly. As always, the sight pleased him.

"Well, let's get on with our planning," Southgate said cheerfully.

"The first thing we need is the money for the Trimble's vacation." He looked at LN. "Can you get it tomorrow?"

"I didn't want to wait until the last minute for everything," LN replied. "I drove down to Clarksdale yesterday and withdrew \$4,000 from an account I've had there for years in my uncle's bank. I've withdrawn amounts that large before on occasion. So that didn't raise any eyebrows. I'll cover the rest we need from a money market fund I'm in here."

"As much as \$3,000 more?" Southgate asked.

"Whatever we need," she said. "I'm prepared to go all the way for us."

"I figure we'll need around \$7,000 alone to keep the Trimble's away for 30 days," Southgate said. "We have to keep them happy. That means first class accommodations for everything." He laid a sheet of paper on the coffee table in front of him. "Here's the way I figure it: Air fare, first class, \$1,742.66 plus an Hawaiian travel tax of \$10.78 for each of them. 2. The hotel for 30 days, \$1,500. That's a special rate I got. 3. Meals and incidental expenses at \$100 a day, \$3,000. Those are the big items. They total \$6,264.22. Then, there'll be the utilities we use at the house to pay for and the limousine to the airport and probably half a dozen smaller things."

"Where are they staying?" asked LN.

"The Paradise Isle. It's very nice. They'll have a small cottage of their own actually, so they won't feel cooped up. They can do some of their own cooking if they want to. They'll have a kitchen, a bedroom and bath, a living room and screened in porch." Southgate laughed. "They won't want to come home."

"At least not for a month, I hope," Togo put in.

"Where can I pick up the tickets?" LN asked.

"Either at the American Airlines counter at the airport or its office downtown," Southgate said, then added, "Wear your disguise and pay cash."

"O.K.," LN replied.

"Have you paid for the hotel?" Togo asked.

"I'm flying up to St. Louis tomorrow. I'll wire the money from there, then fly back."

LN and Togo nodded their approval. Togo asked, "How about the meal money?"

Southgate replied, "LN will stop at the branch office of the Second Tennessee bank at Winchester road and U.S. 51 on her way to pick up the Trimble's next Tuesday, leave the money and make arrangements for traveler's checks for the Trimble's. The Trimble's will stop to **sign** them and pick them up on their way to airport." He rose and walked to the front windows.

LN and Togo watched him, saying nothing. The silence only heightened the intrigue. Beneath the matter-of-fact talk of plans was an air of excitement that grew with each decision. They knew each other well, these three, and their collective I.Q.s, when put to work, were high enough to baffle the best thinkers.

Southgate turned back into the room. "We're all set then for the next few days," he said. "We'll move into the Trimble's house next Tuesday night." He pulled out his wallet and studied a plastic pocket calendar. "That'll be April seventeenth."

That night, Togo worked alone in his home on the engineering aspects of the project. He decided that the tunnel, in order to avoid all possibility of a cave-in from being too close to the surface, should drop down from the basement until its roof was five feet underground. At the same time, he didn't want the tunnel to collapse from too much dirt overhead.

He shut his eyes and quickly went over the basic facts. Sand and gravel weighs one hundred and eleven pounds per cubic foot. At Graceland, enough organic matter was mixed in to make the soil about ten per cent lighter. So, the dirt there would push down on the tunnel with a weight of one hundred pounds per cubic foot.



Togo opened his eyes and reached for his pocket calculator at the back of his cluttered desk. He deftly worked his fingers over the buttons to figure that one hundred and forty-four square inches to a square foot broke down to about four pounds per square inch.

Not overwhelming, he thought.

Satisfied, he decided that two layers of overlapping plywood sheets, three-fourths of an inch thick, would be sufficient to shore up the tunnel roof if resting on wooden beams two inches thick and eight inches wide held up by five foot high support posts.

He added other supplies to his shopping list: One ten horsepower electric motor. One five horsepower electric motor. One plastic swimming pool, fifteen feet round and four feet deep. Two pumps (one a high speed, gear type capable of pressure up to three hundred pounds per square inch.) A sledge hammer. Two welding clamps. One floor fan. One piece of sheet metal, two feet square. Two hundred feet of two inch intake hose (twenty-five foot sections.) Twenty feet of one inch intake hose. One water pipe valve. Two hundred feet of six inch plastic exhaust hose. One dozen small screws. One roll of plastic tape. Two hundred feet of heavy electric cord (number five wire, AWG, two-tenths of an inch in diameter.) Two hundred feet of three inch intake hose. Two hundred and fifty bolts six inches long. Some galvanized metal pipe, one and three-fourths inch in diameter.

The dawn was still only a light pink glow along the edge of the eastern horizon when Southgate left for the airport the next morning to catch the early flight up to St. Louis. In his briefcase was one thousand five hundred dollars of LN's money.

It was hard to place Southgate that day. He looked as much like a banker or business executive as a lawyer. His only luggage was the briefcase, which he kept with him. The stewardess thought his strong muscular face was interesting. She served him coffee first before attending to the other passengers.

Otherwise, the half hour flight back to the stomping grounds of his law school days was uneventful. Once on the ground, Southgate took an airport bus to the center of the city, where he walked to a Western Union office in Market street near Pine.

"Yes, sir," A clerk said, coming forward to the counter. She was a brunette with green eyes and straight white teeth when she smiled.

"I'd like to send a telegram and money order to Harry Lane, general manager of the Paradise Isle hotel in Honolulu," he said snapping open his briefcase. He handed her the message that he'd drafted on the plane. It read: "Wiring money today, per our earlier conversation, for thirty day stay of Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Trimble. Arrive Wednesday. Please meet." It was signed Donald Owens.

"How much do you want to send?" the clerk asked, smiling prettily.

Southgate handed her the bills. "One thousand, five hundred dollars."

The clerk counted the money. "It seems to be all here," she said indifferently. Well, up yours too, Southgate thought as the bills disappeared into a drawer. Shortly, he had his receipt, which he slipped into the briefcase.

"When will that be in Honolulu?" he asked.

"In a couple of hours," the clerk said.

Southgate nodded and left. He had a scotch and water on the return flight and by early afternoon he was back in his office in Old Main. That evening, LN stopped by to tell him she'd picked up the tickets downtown.

On Saturday, Togo called the Old South Lumber company. "I'd like to place an order for fifty sheets of three-fourths plywood, four by eight feet," he said.

"Yes, sir," a male voice said. "Anything else?"

"Some two by eights. Do you have southern pine, number one grade?"

"Yeah, we've got all you need."

"Fine, I need three hundred and thirteen pieces ten feet long and another one hundred and fifty seven of them eight feet long."

"Wow. And what's the name?"

"Weber. I'll pick the order up next Tuesday morning. I'd like each one of the two by eights cut in half."

"They'll be ready, sir."

Then, Togo drove across town to a Sears store, where he bought a five thousand, two hundred and eighty-eight gallon swimming pool for four hundred dollars. A young clerk helped him carry it to his car. From Sears, Togo drove to the Southern Equipment company in Monroe avenue, where he bought the two pumps. He paid cash again and made arrangements to pick them up on Tuesday.

Several blocks over in Alabama avenue, he called on the Edison Electric Motor company and looked over its stock. He chose a five horsepower costing three hundred and eighty dollars and a ten horsepower selling at eight hundred and eighty nine dollars. Again, he paid cash and told them he'd be in next Tuesday to get them.

The smaller things like the sledge hammer<sup>BELTS</sup> and the floor fan he divided buying at two hardware stores near the Delta campus and took them home.

That night, he worked until after midnight to finish the basement portion of the scale model.

Meanwhile, Southgate brought home the form for a surety and fidelity bond he been using at the college. It was one of several he had as examples in class work. This particular form was from a defunct New York City firm. He made it out between Family Opinions, Inc, and the Trimble for \$325,000 to cover their house and its contents. With a flourish of the pen he signed on behalf of the insurer with the name of William Gibbs, executive vice president. The bond was good until one minute after midnight on May eighteenth.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Twenty

Gershon Wingo's van wasn't in its first blush of youth. He'd kept it dirty and driven it hard during the five years of its existence on the Delta campus. And he'd been more than generous in allowing friends to use it for errands and light hauls. So on Monday morning, Togo thought nothing of slipping over to see the big bellied painter and wrestling coach about borrowing the vehicle for his surreptitious cartage.

He found Gershon in his basement studio in the library crating a half dozen freshly done paintings. Gershon continued to work as the two men talked. "Mr. Axelbank wants these on an air cargo flight for London tonight," he explained, hammering a nail into a wooden slat. "He thinks the British will love them."

"At this pace, you'll be wealthy soon," Togo commented.

Gershon screwed up one eye and wiped a bead of sweat from his neck. "Maybe," he said. "But after Mr. Axelbank takes his share, I doubt it." He picked up another slat from the floor.

"What are the chances of using the van tomorrow?" Togo asked. "I'd like to pick up some lumber."

"O.K. I won't need it after I drop these paintings at the airport." Gerhson sighed and forced a smile. "I worked all weekend on these. Tomorrow, you take the van and I'll rest."

"I don't know just what time I'll get away to the lumber yard," Togo said, his face a mask of innocence. "It might be easier if I keep it all night."

"Suit yourself," Gerhson said tautly.

Togo swallowed a smile. "That's what I'll do then."

Gerhson nailed on another slat. "Pick it up at the gym," he instructed Togo. "I'll be over there tomorrow."

"Will do."

The last slat lay on the floor. Gerhson bent down and grabbed it. With a dozen final furious blows of the hammer, the paintings were crated.

"I'll help you carry them out," Togo said. But Gerhson had already tossed the crate on his back as though it were a six pack.

"Just open the doors for me," he shouted.

Outside, Togo held open the back doors of the black, dusty van. Gerhson twisted around and dropped the crate gently on the edge of the floor, then pushed it in. Togo banged the doors closed. Gerhson strolled around to the front and climbed into the driver's seat.

"It's all yours tomorrow," he yelled to Togo as he waved and drove away.

That night, after dinner, Togo carried the floor fan he'd bought on Saturday into his workshop along with a piece of thin galvanized sheet metal. He took a pair of metal sheers from a hook on his peg-board and cut the sheet into four triangular pieces as if he were slicing up a pumpkin pie. Next, he cut a three inch circle at the points, then bent a quarter inch flange along the sides. With a metal drill, he spaced small holes along the bent edges and screwed them back together.

The metal was no longer flat. It had taken on the shape of a funnel. Togo measured the sides of the fan, then cut four strips of plastic tape to match. He taped the fan and the metal sheet together, then placed a short piece of the exhaust hose in the circle he'd cut earlier.

He ambled over to an electric outlet above his work bench and plugged in the fan. He turned it on high and put his hand in front of the hose. Cool air poured out through the opening. Togo had just finished the exhaust system for the tunnel. As they burrowed deeper into the earth, the exhaust hose would be extended along the top of the tunnel from the fan at the entrance to give them fresh air.

Togo cleaned up his tools, then went to the telephone in his study and dialed. He stood patiently by his desk, moving one foot idly as he listened to the rings.

"Hello, Brax," he said when they stopped. "The exhaust system is ready. We won't have to hold our breath in the tunnel."

Southgate laughed. At times, Togo really tickled him. "Or our farting," he replied.

"We'll be too busy for that," Togo said.

"Soon, we'll know how difficult it's going to be," Southgate said. After a moment's silence, he asked. "Will we be digging forty eight hours from now?"

"We should be if LN shepherds the Trimble's out of town on schedule."

"She's ready. I talked to her an hour ago. She was climbing into bed then so she'd be fresh as a daisy in the morning."

Togo glanced at his watch. The dial read ten forty-five. "I'm ready for some shut-eye myself. This might be our last good night's sleep for a while. I've got Gershon's van, by the way."

"That'll make the hauling easier."

"I'll pick it up in the morning. I have a nine o'clock lecture class in the morning. After that nothing."

"Same here. Why don't I drive you to the campus in the morning."

"Yeah. Then, I'll get the van and drive it back to your house. We'll wait there."

"Okah. Get here as soon as you can."

"See you then." Togo put down the phone. After a fast shower, he tumbled into bed and soon was asleep. A few blocks away, Southgate followed suit.



LN's electric alarm clock went off at five forty-five the next morning. She arose without a struggle in a mixed mood of anticipation and anxiety. Both would be with her, she knew, until she'd put the Trimbles safely aboard their plane. Thank God, the airport was just a few miles from their home. That gave her some sense of security.

LN stepped into the shower and adjusted the spray until a watery mist hung in the air all around her. She stood mute, letting the hot water cascade over her shoulders and down her body, stimulating her skin and awakening her as nothing else could. As she soaped herself, she wondered what her world would be like thirty days hence. She might have her library money or, horror of horrors, be in jail.

Involuntarily, she shuddered at the last thought.

But Brax and Togo, the two persons she relied on most in the world, didn't seem to worry and they were counting on her now to whisk the Trimbles away. She turned and let the spray wash over her face. A few moments later, she twisted the faucets off and reached for the soft, fluffy towel on a rack just outside the shower. In seconds she was dry and slipping into her nylon panties and bra.

The wig and make-up came last. She fretted over those, adjusting interminably, until she was satisfied that her appearance was the same as on her first visit. Then, after a quick breakfast, she drove off in her red Triumph toward downtown Memphis.

After a twenty-five minute drive through streets in the vanguard of the morning rush hour, she pulled into a public garage in Adams avenue a few blocks from the downtown riverfront, picked up a parking stub from a sleepy attendant, and doubled back around the corner to the Mercury Limousine Service.

"Good morning, I'm Jane Walters," she announced to the clerk on duty, a pudgy man with stubby fingers and fleshy jowls.

"Yes, Miss Walters. Your limousine is ready." He pressed down a button on the microphone on the counter. "Mike Courtney, front and center."

"Isn't it a pleasant morning," LN said.

"Just beautiful. There isn't a cloud in the sky."

A shiny, black seven passenger car with the thinnest of red stripes around its mid-section pulled up outside the building. LN stepped briskly forward to the sidewalk, where a tall, elderly man in a gray uniform held open the rear door for her.

"Good morning, ma'am, I'm Mike Courtney."

"Good morning," LN said and smiled politely. "I'm Jane Walters." Before getting in, she added. "We're going to 1463 Dolan drive. On the way, I want to stop at a bank at U. S. 51 and Winchester road." She climbed in and leaned back on the soft upholstered seat. Such luxury, she thought. The car drove off. LN sloped forward. "We need to time ourselves so we make a ten o'clock flight at the airport," she said.

As he picked up speed, the driver nodded.

It was eight thirty-two on the bank clock when LN's limousine glided into the parking lot. The Second Tennessee bank branch at the intersection of U.S. 51 and Winchester road had been open two minutes. LN hurried inside, where she ordered three thousand dollars in traveler's checks.

"These aren't for me," she explained to the teller, a woman in her mid-thirties with frosted hair. "Can you get them ready for a Glenn Trimble? I'll stop back in twenty minutes on the way to the airport to pay for them and with Mr. Trimble to countersign them."

"That'll be no problem," the teller said. "I'll have them ready."

When LN left the bank, her driver hopped out of the limousine and again held the door open for her. LN smiled inwardly and thought to herself, I could get used to this. A half mile farther on at the Trimbles four pieces of copper colored soft vinyl luggage stood at ready in the entrance to the double garage. The limousine eased backwards up the driveway. While LN went to the front door, where Mr. Trimble stood waiting, the chauffeur opened the trunk and loaded the bags.

"Hello there," LN called out from the stoop. "All set to go?"

"Glenn's making a last minute pit stop," Mrs. Trimble replied. She gave LN a quick wink. "Then, we're ready."

LN gestured toward the car with its open trunk. "Anymore luggage?"

Mrs. Trimble pointed to the floor. "Just this tote bag."

LN turned. "Mr. Courtney," she called. "Here's another piece of luggage." The driver hurried up the walk. "It'll just fit in the trunk," he said, measuring it with his eye.

"Oh, there're the girls," Mrs. Trimble exclaimed.

LN squinted into the sun. Coming up the drive, all smiles, ~~was~~ a trio of women. "Hi," one of them shouted. "We came to see you off." Mrs. Trimble, in a lightweight powder blue suit and blouse, came out of the house and walked to greet them.

"Miss Walters, I want you to meet the neighbors," she said ~~over~~ her shoulder ~~to~~ LN. LN scudded down the driveway, where the group had congregated in front of the limousine.

Pointing to a blonde, about forty, in slacks and blouse, Mrs. Trimble said, "This is Amy Cline." LN nodded in recognition. "Amy, and the rest of you, too, This is Jane Walters. She's going to house sit while we're gone."

A woman, slightly older than Amy, said, "I'm Harriet Warren."

"And I'm Carol Rowan," put in the third, dark haired and shorter than the others.

"I'm pleased to know all of you," LN said, smiling. "This is going to make it much easier for me knowing who you all are."

"We're here to help you in any way we can," Amy Cline volunteered. Her voice was melodious. She pointed across the street to a rambling, red brick ranch house. "I live over there."

"And I live there," said Carol Rowan, motioning in the direction of the house next to the garage.

Harriet Warren turned her eyes on LN. "That leaves me to protect the other side," she laughed, pointing to the house to the west."

"I'll be gone some days," LN said. "But I'll be staying here nights and week-ends. I won't have a chauffeured limousine, though," she added with a laugh. "Usually, I drive a red Triumph."

"That's what we'll look for then," Harriet Warren said.

I'll bet you will, LN thought. "There might be other cars, from time to time," she said casually. "We also employ a security service. And I have a brother. He drives a black van at times. You might see that in the driveway."

LN smiled sweetly. What a break this is, she thought, I can explain things to them so what they see later will seem natural and routine. Her eyes wandered over the group. "My brother is somewhat of a night owl. I'll ask him to be as quiet as possible if he stops by late."

"Oh, we never go to bed before eleven-thirty," Carol Rowan said.

"Well, I'll try to be a good neighbor," LN said.

Mr. Trimble came out of the house then. LN looked at her watch. It was nine-ten. "We should be going," she said. Slowly, they all walked to the rear door of the limousine.

Carol Rowan stepped forward and kissed both the Trimbles on the cheek. "Have a wonderful time," she said. The Trimbles climbed in the back seat, followed by LN. The driver closed the door, then hurried around the front of the car and eased in under the steering wheel. As the car rolled down the drive, the neighbors waved.

"Send us a postcard," they called happily.

At the bank, Mr. Trimble signed the traveler's checks as the teller watched. Then, it was on to the airport. LN handled the tickets until the luggage had been checked through, then gave them to Mr. Trimble, who, in turn, passed her the house key.

"You'll need that," he laughed.

They walked on toward the security station, which they passed through without incident. At the boarding gate, their fellow passengers were streaming toward the plane. Just as the Trimbles were about to disappear into the tunnel, he turned, an anxious look on his face.

"Oh, Miss Walters," he called, walking back to her. "Did you get the surety bond?"

LN, feigning consternation, reached into her purse and removed a folded, legal looking paper. "Oh, Mr. Trimble, I apologize to you," she said. "I have it right here."

What Mr. Trimble didn't know was that LN, fearful he might balk, had always planned to wait until the last minute to give it to him. Now, she relaxed, sure that any danger he might refuse the terms was past. She handed the bond to him.

Mr. Trimble studied the paper, then looked up at LN. "This is very generous," he said.

LN smiled. "You'd better hurry onto the plane, Mr. Trimble."

"You're right," he replied. He turned and waved as he ducked into the tunnel again.

From the terminal's observation deck, LN watched the big plane carrying the Trimbles lumber slowly to the end of the runway. It paused for an instant, then, as the pilot opened the throttle, the plane picked up speed as it moved down the long runway until its wheels no longer touched the ground.

After a stopover in Dallas-Fort Worth, it would off again to Honolulu.

LN followed the plane until it was a mere speck in the western sky. Then, she hurried down the corridor to a telephone. She waited impatiently while her call rang at the other end.

"Hello," a voice said after a short time.

"Brax, they're on their way," she said excitedly. "The house is ours."

"The van is here," he replied. "Togo and I are ready to go."

"Good luck, hear," she said. Minutes later the limousine sped along the freeway toward downtown. LN, alone again in the back seat, settled deeper into the cushions and closed her eyes. She'd enjoy this ride.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*



## Chapter Twenty Two

Southgate and Togo jumped in the van and headed toward the lumber yard.

"We've got some busy hours ahead," Togo said, his hands gripped tightly on the steering wheel. "The lumber will take three, maybe four, trips.

"Too bad we couldn't have it delivered."

"I didn't want to chance leaving a trail."

Southgate nodded agreement. His arm rested on the window edge. He and Togo were both dressed in green cover-alls. Southgate also had on a battered baseball cap he'd worn fishing for several years.

Togo moved the van in and out of traffic.

"After the lumber, then what?" Southgate asked.

"The pumps and motors. The swimming pool is already in the trunk of my car."

The van pulled up beside the office of the Old South Lumber company. Togo hopped out and went inside alone, where he paid the bill and received the order slip for the yard foreman. He returned a few moments later. "We can drive into the yard and load," he said, climbing behind the wheel again.

In the yard, Togo handed the order slip to the foreman, a gaunt, weathered man wearing a gray butcher's smock over his shirt and slacks. Soon, the first load of plywood was stacked in the back of the van.

"We'll be back in about an hour," Togo told the foreman. "Are the two by eights ready?"

The foreman pointed to a big table saw. "All cut," he replied. Neatly stacked nearby were nine hundred and forty pieces in four and five foot lengths. "What are you fellas building, a pygmy village?" the foreman's eyes sparkled briefly and the lines on his face crinkled.

"Hot houses for a truck farm," Southgate replied straightfaced. "Don't need much head room, you know."

"Hey, I never thought of that," the yard man said, scratching his own head.

Southgate settled down in his seat and pulled the door closed. Togo eased the van out of the yard into the street traffic. At Togo's house, they unloaded quickly, then drove back to the lumber company.

"That didn't take long," the foreman said when they returned.

Togo and Southgate swung open the back doors of the van and began laying in the rest of the plywood. Then, they piled two by eights on top of the last sheet until Southgate held up his hand. "That's all. It's going to take a couple of more trips anyway."

Togo nodded.

"I wish we could just unload this at the Trimble's," Southgate said as they drove along.

"Too much sawing and hammering involved for that," Togo said. "It'll be much easier to do the preliminary work at my house."

"And safer."

"That, too."

The van stopped for a red light. "The plywood will fit as is," Togo said. "The carpentry work is with the supports. We'll have to nail three two by eights together after trimming eight inches off of the center one." He turned to look at Southgate, a humorous glint in his eye. "You can split up the waste for kindling. It'll be good practice for the prison firewood detail."

"Ha," Southgate grunted. "That'll be the day."

The van pulled away from the intersection. Togo's eyes were on the road again. "There's going to be a lot of drilling for the bolt holes," he said. "One hole through each end of the cross beams and two in each post. Then, we'll have to slip bolts through the posts into the cross beams set in the grooves and out again on the other side. God, Brax, there must be a simpler way to make a million dollars.

Southgate laughed.

"What size are the bolt holes again?" Southgate asked.

"Half an inch."

"My drill will work. I'll bring it over. That'll give us two."

"I'd planned on that," Togo replied.

Togo pulled the van into his driveway. After unpacking, they stopped for a sandwich, then returned to the lumber yard for their final loads.

"Good luck, Mr. Weber," the foreman yelled as they drove away, the last time.

"Weber?" Southgate questioned.

"Yeah, that's the name I gave them," Togo explained. A wide grin spread across his face.

There was a loading dock at the pump company, where they went after dropping off the last van of lumber at Togo's. They slid the crates into the van, as far forward as possible, added the hoses, then went on to pick up the electric motors and cord. On the way home, they stopped at a hardware store to pick up fifty pounds of number 20d common nails.

"I almost forgot them," Togo admitted sheepishly.

"What's the old saw," Southgate recited. "For the want of a nail, the kingdom was lost."

"We came close," Togo replied.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Twenty Two

LN drove into the Trimble's driveway at twilight and stepped out of her car with her luggage. Amy Cline was spraying a cluster of azalea bushes in the front corner of her lawn.

"Hi," she called out and waved.

LN put down her bags and walked across the street. "Well, my first night in my new home," she said, glancing back over her shoulder at the Trimble's.

"Are you apprehensive about being alone?"

"Oh, no. I expect my older brother will be by later. He takes good care of me."

"If he's like mine, it wasn't always that way."

LN laughed. "Not always. We had our sibling rivalries."

Don't make too much of him, LN told herself. The next thing you know she'll want to meet him. This openness with the neighbors was going to be a delicate balancing act, she thought. Still, it seemed the most natural approach. She was sure aloofness would cause more suspicion.

"Well, I must get my luggage in," LN said. She stepped back and half turned.

"See you later," said Amy. She looked closely at one of the bushes, then gave it another shot with her insecticide gun. Out of the corner of her eye she watched LN walk into the house and close the door.

LN lifted her biggest suitcase up on the Trimble's guest bed and opened it. Her eyes wandered about the room. The rosy beige wall gave her a feeling of warmth. She opened the window a crack, a light breeze stirred the white ruffled curtains.

She lifted several dresses from the bag and crossed a colorful braided rug to the closet. A telephone rang in another part of the house. LN stopped short, a wave of uneasiness rippled through her body. It was an eerie feeling, being alone in a strange place in a surreptitious role wondering whether to answer.

All her attention concentrated on the possibilities. Was it a friend of the Trimble's? Was it a heavy breather aware she was alone? Was it Togo or Southgate checking on her arrival? She hesitated, then resolutely dropped the dresses back on the bed as the ringing persisted.

Outside in the hall, the sound was closer. She followed it into the master bedroom and, still in some trepidation picked up the receiver.

"Hello," she said cautiously.

"Hey, where were you?" came Brax's reassuring voice.

LN breathed a deep sigh of relief. "Oh, am I glad its you. I didn't know whether to answer."

"It's almost dark. We're getting ready to leave with our first load," Southgate said. "Are things squared away there?"

"All quiet," LN answered. "How soon will you be here?"

"Say forty-five minutes. We'd like to pull into the garage."

"One bay is clear. Their car's in the other on the far side. I'm parked in front of that door."

"Good. Always park there so we can use the empty side for the van." Southgate paused, then continued. "Leave the light off in the garage. Go out there in about forty minutes. Open the door and wait for us. If someone gets nosey, say you're just checking things out on your first night."

"Okah."

"See you."

LN heard the click as Southgate hung up. She stood motionless for a few seconds, then put her own receiver down. She hoped the phone won't ring again. It gave her the jitters. In time, perhaps, she get used to answering. Still, there'd always be the possibility of that one call she couldn't handle, she thought.

She walked back into the guest room. She'd have to get used to the uncertainty of the next thirty days, she concluded, and ~~the~~ sooner the better. Her face hardened. With that, she went back to unpacking, glancing at her watch now and then so she'd be down in the garage on time.

LN stood in the shadows waiting. Outside the chirp of crickets broke the silence of a warm spring night. It was completely dark now. Occasionally, she heard the sound of an auto in U.S. 51 a block away. Finally, a set of headlight beams flashed on the pavement from a vehicle which had turned into Dolan drive. Then, just as suddenly, they vanished.

She waited. The soft roll of tires reached her ears. She spotted the outline of the van coast into the driveway, then heard the engine power increase again slightly for the final ride into the garage.

Inside, the van came to a halt. LN quickly closed the doors. With the aid of a small pocket flashlight, she walked to the door on the driver's side.

"Well done," Togo said, stepping down.

Southgate felt his way around the front bumper. The three of them stood silently gazing at each other's outlines. "Let's go inside and look over the basement first," he suggested. Without waiting for an answer, he opened the door inside and stepped forward. LN followed with Togo behind her.



At the top of the basement stairs, Southgate flipped the light switch on and started down. The others followed. They stopped at the bottom of the stairs and surveyed the room.

"This is beautiful," Southgate said. "Made to order." He pointed to the center of the far wall. "We can set up the swimming pool right over there."

Togo stepped around him and started across the wide stretch of floor toward the utility room. "Let's check for a drain." Southgate and LN immediately fell in step behind him. They paused at the door and looked inside. A washer and dryer lined one wall. On the other side of the room was the furnace. Nearby, they saw the circuit breaker panel. Togo's eyes dropped to the floor.

"There it is," he exclaimed.

"Hooray," LN cried out softly. "I was afraid I'd goofed."

Togo walked over to the furnace. In the floor beside it was a drain fed by a small copper pipe that twisted its way around the heating unit. Togo touched the pipe. "For water from the air conditioning system," he said. "A double duty system." Southgate nodded.

LN stretched her foot out and touched the drain. "Can we use it?" she asked, a tightness in her voice.

"It looks all right," Togo replied. "We won't really know until we test it."

Togo walked over to the circuit breakers, where he pulled a screwdriver from his back pocket. With quick rotations of his hand, he removed the screws in the four corners of the cover and lifted it off. He studied the maze of wires inside. At the top of the box, he spotted the two heavy wires bringing the current in from outside power lines.

He pointed to their terminal bolts. "We'll bootleg our power from them," he said. "We'll pull it out upstream from the circuit breakers. The house lights will dim a little, but not enough to notice from the outside."

"Everything seems to be in this room," Southgate said. He walked over to a sink beside the washer. "This looks like the main water pipe."

"Turn its handle," Togo suggested. "Let's see what happens."

Southgate closed the valve and turned on the cold water faucet in the sink. Nothing came out.

"That's it," Togo said. "We'll tap in for water there."

Southgate re-opened the valve. "Shall we begin to unload?" he asked.

"What are we going to do first?" LN inquired.

"Put up the swimming pool," Southgate replied.

The three left the room together. Upstairs again in the garage, Southgate and Togo lifted the folded pool from the van. Almost noiselessly, they carried it inside the house and down the stairs to the basement.

A few minutes later, Southgate and LN began to assemble the metal frame while Togo returned upstairs. He stepped outside into the darkness. After a few moments, confident he was not observed, he walked toward the street. In the lawn near the curb, he lifted ~~the~~ the cast iron cover from the water meter and pipe connected to the house. Quickly, he dropped to his knees and pointed a small flashlight beam into the shallow manhole, located the valve, and with a vice-grip turned off the water.

Back inside, he picked up his tools, a small cylinder of propane gas and a feeder hose from the van. Down in the basement again, ~~he~~ dropped the hose off in the pool area and disappeared into the utility room. He turned on a faucet in the sink next to the washing machine and bled the house pipes dry. Then, with the skill of a surgeon he sliced out a one and one-half inch section from the copper pipe with a pipe cutter.

With a small hose, he sucked out any remaining water from the pipes to make them as dry as possible. He sandpapered the exposed ends of the pipe, then slipped a T-section over both of them. Using a plumber's torch connected to the cylinder of gas, he first soldered the T-section in place, then soldered a new faucet onto it.

Togo looked at his watch. The operation had taken a little more than a half hour. He went back outside and turned on the water, then checked his work for leaks. He found none. A dual system was now in place, one for the pool, the other for the house, where an investigation found the water pressure normal.

Togo went back into the big room, where he picked up the feeder hose. Southgate and LN continued to work. Togo returned to the utility room and screwed the hose on the new faucet, then he unrolled it along the floor back to the pool area.

LN brushed back a stray ~~piece~~ of hair from her forehead. She'd removed the wig. "How long will it take to fill this?" she asked.

"About two hours," said Togo. He began to help them work.

When the pool was up, a big vat now of green plastic, Southgate wired the hose to the top of the frame. ~~Several feet~~ of it dangled down inside.

"That should do it," he said triumphantly.

Togo nodded. "LN, you do the honors."

"We should have a champagne bottle to break over the faucet," she said lightheartedly, walking into the utility room. Togo and Southgate laughed. When she returned, water was flowing steadily into the pool. "Good show," she ~~remarked~~, then asked, "what next?"

"Let's empty the van," Southgate replied.

First, they brought down the light equipment- electric wire, the sledge hammer, the other hoses and so on. Then, groaning and straining, they carefully tread the stairs with the pumps and motors. Finally, they carried down the first several sheets of plywood and a couple of completed shoring arches.

Togo picked up the sledge hammer. "I'd love to smash open the wall next," he exclaimed.

"Better not until we've taken the compass reading in the morning," Southgate admonished.

"I know," Togo answered, putting the sledge hammer down. "Let's finish the pumps and motors now."

Two wooden sleds they'd made at Togo's were ready nearby. They lifted the five horsepower onto one and the ten horsepower onto the other. Then, they bolted the smaller pump to be used to remove the muck from the tunnel to the five horsepower motor and the larger pump for the drilling to the more powerful engine.

"Now, for the tricky part," Togo said.

He went over to the equipment pile, sorted out the two welder's clamps and fastened them to one end of the wire, a heavy underground copper cable wrapped in a cross-knitted polyethylene jacket. At the other end, he attached an insulated phenolic terminal block. To it, he hooked on two waterproof main disconnect switches housed in metal containers about the size of cigar boxes. He attached the cord from the five horsepower motor to one and the cord from the ten horsepower to the other.

"Oh, hell," Togo said, "I forgot something."

He spliced the wire just below the welder's clamps and inserted a shock detector.

"What's that?" LN asked.

"It's a sensitive fuse that cuts off the current in half a second," Togo said. "Say one of us sprays water on the motors." He snapped his fingers. "Just like that, the power would cut off because of the circuit breaker. It will save us from electrocution."

"That tunnel is going to be wet and muddy," Southgate put in.

"We need to be careful."

"I see," LN said, a trace of apprehension in her voice.

Togo picked up the clamps, with their big alligator like teeth, and walked to the circuit breaker box in the utility room, the wire unwinding behind him. Southgate and LN followed. He placed the clamps on the terminal bolts of the heavy wire bringing the power in from outside.

"Brax, go turn on the five horsepower," Togo said.

Southgate went into the other room and flipped the switch in the disconnect box. The motor started. He walked to the door of the utility room. "It's on," he said.

"Now, we'd better all say a prayer," Togo said. "Go back and turn on the ten horsepower so both of them are running at the same time." He emitted a nervous cough. "This could blow a transformer."

"Jesus, Togo, do you really think so?" Southgate asked.

"We'll know one way or the other when you flip that switch, Brax. Until then, it's just conjecture."

Southgate walked to the disconnect switch connected to the ten horsepower. He stood over it for a few seconds. For an instant, he longed for the old routine of class lectures, correcting papers, a drink with LN in the late afternoon, a book to read in the evening. Then, he reached down. First, there was the click of the switch. Next, he heard both motors running together. He'd expected the worst. It hadn't happened. He ran back to the utility room and threw his arms around Togo.

"You've done it, you damned genius, you've done it," he yelled.

Togo untangled him. "It's nothing I've done," he said. "But, by by-passing the circuit breakers I think we've fixed it so we can have the power load we'll need." He sighed, still indicating caution, and held his hand on the heavy wires in the box. "We'll need to check these frequently at first to make sure they're not overheating," he said.

"What could happen if they did?" Southgate asked.

"We could burn down the house."

"My God, you're cheerful, Togo," LN said.

"We need to be careful," Togo replied.

"I know," she said, patting his arm.

Southgate interrupted. "Is there anything else we can do tonight?" he asked.

"I don't think so," Togo said. He looked at his watch. It was midnight.

"Let's turn everything off and get some sleep," Southgate said.

Togo felt the wires again. "Still O.K."

\*\*\*\* \* \* \* \*



## Chapter Twenty Three

The next morning, everyone was up early. As soon as the sun was high enough for them to see the stained glass windows on the southside of the gravesite, they went outside and walked to the white fence between the Trimble's backyard and Graceland.

Southgate stood directly in line with the third window, a trail of footprints in the dew behind him. "The tunnel should run right under here," he said, gazing at the backside of the curved wall of the open style Grecian temple in which the four windows were set. "The king's grave is straight ahead. Remember, Togo?"

"Indeed."

Togo pulled a compass from his pocket and walked back toward the house. "Stay put," he called to Southgate over his shoulder. At the house, he leaned against the wall and took a compass reading of three hundred and fifty nine degrees on Southgate. He walked back and told them.

"Let's pace off the distance from the corner of the house to where you were standing," Southgate said to Togo. "We'll do the same in the basement, where we'll take our three hundred and fifty nine degrees reading again."

Togo paced off the distance in the basement. Two knotty cedar panels were removed and carefully leaned against a wall in a corner of the room. Exposed before them was the bare cinder block foundation. LN brought over the sledge hammer.

But first, Southgate took a tape measure and a piece of chalk and drew an outline of the tunnel entrance on the face of the sub-structure.

"It's not Rembrandt but it serves it's purpose," he said. "Give it a whack, LN."

LN struck a blow that chipped out the center of the marked area. She followed with several more until a number of chips covered the floor. Then Togo took the sledge hammer and with swift, penetrating blows knocked open a hole. The work was easier after that. The entrance grew steadily larger until only ragged edges remained along the chalk lines.

Southgate evened them with a chisel. Then, he and Togo built a wooden frame around the inside of the cinder block.

Togo stepped forward and poked the dirt, which crumbled and rolled out on the floor.

"The texture seems loose," he said.

LN looked at her watch. "It's eight fifteen," she said. "Shouldn't we get ready to leave for the campus?"

"I hate to leave," Southgate said. "But I guess we have to. Togo and I will go first in the van."

LN nodded. "I'll have to put my wig on to drive out," she said.

"Check," Southgate replied.

A few minutes later the van rolled down the driveway and out of sight. LN followed shortly. About halfway to the campus, she took off her wig. A real Dr. Jekyll and Mrs. Hyde, she thought and laughed to herself.

That night after dark Southgate and Togo returned in the van. LN was waiting in the garage again as she'd done before. They unloaded the fan and additional frames of shoring supports. This time, they also had heavy rubber raincoats and boots with them.

A few final details were completed before the tunneling began. The pumps were put in place near the entrance, the large one with the hydraulic lance first. A hose was run back from it to the swimming pool. A second hose was stretched out along the floor from the second pump system to the drain in the utility room. The electric wiring was tucked neatly along the wallboard, as much to itself as possible.

The room, with its tangle of wires and hoses, began to resemble a plate of spaghetti.

"Shall we?" Southgate asked.

Togo took the hydraulic lance in his hand and stood at the face of the tunnel. "Turn it on."

The stream of high powered water cut rapidly into the dirt and pulverized it into a soupy liquid that ran down the face of the tunnel and collected in a puddle on the floor. Southgate started the second pump. With its hose he sucked up the muck as though he were using a vacuum cleaner.

"LN, check the wires in the circuit breaker box," Togo shouted.

She ran into the utility room and placed her hand against them. They were cool. She went over to the drain. The muck was running down it in a steady stream. She returned to the wires and checked them again. Still cool.

"There's no heat in the wires," she reported, returning to the big room.

"O.K.," Togo said. His raincoat was splattered with mud and water. "Check them every five minutes for a while." LN nodded and looked at her watch. It was nine-ten.

Togo kept boring into the dirt with the hydraulic lance. Occasionally, a small stone or two fell away. A screen kept them from entering the muck hose.

Togo was on his knees now as he maneuvered the lance. His hair was caked with mud and his face grimy and wet. Southgate was cleaner, but he, too, was dirty and damp. He crawled in next to Togo.

"We'd better slope it down gradually," he yelled.

Togo cut the water lance off. With his forearm, he wiped off the water over his eyes. "I'm not going straight down. Think of the model. Our descent is a gentle slope until the ceiling is five feet below the surface."

Southgate remembered. "Oh, yeah," he said. After a moment, he added, "maybe the model should be here in the basement instead of at your house."

"I agree," Togo said. "Let's bring it over tomorrow night."

Southgate nodded. He studied Togo's muddy hair. "Do you think we should wear hats?" he asked.

"Too damned hot, at least for me," Togo replied. "It's easier to wash my hair every night." He looked into his friend's eyes. "If you think this is uncomfortable, wait until we're fifty feet in. You'll wish you were a salamander."

Southgate laughed. "How about a duck?"

"That, too."

Southgate turned and crawled back to his position. With a spurt, the lance dug into the dirt again. In a hushed voice, audible only to himself, Togo began to sing, "Take my Body, Take My Soul, Take my body with the rock and roll."

LN checked the wires again. Still cool. She reported to Southgate, who told her, "I think we're O.K. on those now. They're taking our power load easily. Look at them only every half hour or so."

"That's a relief," LN answered. I was getting pretty tired of running to that circuit breaker box every few minutes."

"Hey, Brax," Togo had turned and was calling to his companion. "Water is starting to build up in here."

"Gotta go," Southgate said.

The hose reached up against the face of the tunnel like the snout of an anteater and sucked up the muck.

"Better keep it right there for a while," Togo said. "It's an easy cut right now. The dirt is peeling away fast."

It took them an hour to dig away three feet. Togo shut off the lance and left the tunnel. Southgate moved in and cleaned up the muck until only an occasional drip was left. The ten horsepower motor had stopped. Southgate crawled out and switched off the second pump.

He re-entered the tunnel and took out his compass. It read three hundred and fifty nine degrees.

"Still on target," he said re-emerging.

Togo, with LN's help, carried a sheet of plywood to the entrance. "O.K." he said to Southgate, "grab a support frame."

The frames were stacked a few feet away on the floor. Southgate took one and dragged it into the tunnel. The space was cramped. He held the frame steady with one hand and twisted around until he was facing the opening. He saw Togo and LN on their knees with the plywood.

"O.K. Ready," Southgate shouted.

Togo didn't reply. He pushed the first three feet of the plywood sheet into the tunnel. Southgate pushed the support frame up and forward until it was upright. Then, he wedged it in under the plywood.

Togo dropped his hands. Outside the tunnel, LN held up the drooping end of the plywood until Togo temporarily nailed it to the entrance frame.

Both men crawled out of the tunnel. "How's your support," Togo asked.

"Seems tight enough," said Southgate. "It's a snug fit."

Southgate stood beside the pool with LN when Togo came out.

"Might be a good idea to top this off every night," he said. Togo replied at once, "LN, that can be your responsibility. While Southgate and I are working in the tunnel, it'll be up to you to check on the water level."

"The pool should be full every night when we start," Southgate said.

"I'll keep an eye on it," LN promised.

Togo turned to face Southgate. "Let's dig in another five feet and put up two more supports, then call it quits for the night."

Without a word, Southgate undertook the task. After digging two more feet, they struggled to add another support, then repeated the process after three more feet. The first plywood sheet was now entirely inside the tunnel.

One frame was wobbly. Togo left the tunnel and returned with several blocks of wood. Southgate slid one under the left side of the frame. He shook the support. It didn't move.

"Solid as a rock," he said.

\*\*\*\*\*



## Chapter Twenty Four

Southgate slowed his car as he passed Carrie Westfall's grave on the road that lead up to the house of the Delta college president. The site was so restful he almost wished they weren't going to disturb it.

Southgate had liked Carrie. She'd been an ideal partner for Gleamer, a gracious and witty hostess who could twist cantankerous alumni around her little finger. She'd been a pretty woman with pale blue eyes, fair hair and fair of face. Only near the end had he noticed shadows around her eyes and care rings under her make-up.

Southgate pulled into the circular drive in front of the house and stopped just beyond the steps. He'd barely climbed out of his car when Gleamer appeared. Southgate wasn't a small man, but, at six feet four inches, the college president towered over him as they walked up to the door.

"Are you in a hurry?" Gleamer asked.

"Not at all," Southgate assured him and added delicately, "I'll stay for as long as you need me."

"Good. Let's get down to business and then have a bite to eat."

The noon air was warm. Gleamer led Southgate through the living room and out onto a screened porch. A strip of sunlight, about two feet wide, crept along the floor on the southside. The rest was shaded. Both men sat down on white wicker chairs with blue flowered cloth covers. Southgate opened his briefcase and removed several folders.

"Gleamer, I've made out papers for different options," Southgate explained. "Originally, we talked about moving Carrie to a cemetery. But, you ought to consider cremation, too," Southgate paused and thought for a moment. "I could scatter the ashes here on the farm while you're gone. That way, you'd still keep your word to Carrie to bring her back to the farm. At the same time, for Boots' sake, the grave would disappear. You'd keep your word to her, too."

Gleamer hesitated, thrown off balance. When he spoke, his words were drawn out. "Well, Carrie didn't object to cremation. I just hadn't thought of it before." He brushed back the shock of unruly hair from his forehead. Southgate sat rock still. After a few moments consideration, Gleamer nodded. "I like the idea, Brax. Frankly, I was uneasy about Carrie. I felt I was just kicking her out. I'd feel better with her ashes here."

Southgate sighed inwardly. "It's a nice solution all around," he agreed and smiled at Gleamer. He reached for a folder. "Just sign here," he said handing a paper to the soon to be married widower. He pointed to a line with a small "x" marked beside it.

Gleamer took the pen and carefully signed his name.

"That'll do it," Southgate said.

"You're a good friend, Brax," His tone lightened. "Now, let's have some soup and sandwiches."

Southgate returned to his townhouse in late afternoon buoyed by Gleamer's acceptance of his new arrangements. With the successful beginning of the tunnel, he'd forged ahead. Until then, he'd been prepared to forget Elvis, if necessary, and have the college president merely sign the power of attorney to transfer his wife's body to another cemetery. Now, Carrie would help him.

Southgate settled down at his desk and removed from his briefcase the legal paper Gleamer had signed. He made a very detailed inspection. Everything had to be right. Once Gleamer left on his honeymoon, he'd be out of contact for two months.

When he found everything in order, a great wave of relief swept over Southgate.

His next move was to telephone LN. He hoped she hadn't left for the Trimble's house yet. The receiver was picked up on the fourth ring.

"Hello." The voice was melodious.

"Hi. Can you come over?"

"Are you lucky. I was just walking out the door."

"On your way to the Trimble's?"

"Non-stop."

"Drop by for a few minutes. There's no need for you to be there before dark really."

"See you shortly."

Southgate had barely hung up when his doorbell rang. LN was wearing her wig. He ushered her into the den.

"I didn't expect to see you in that," Southgate said, sitting at his desk again.

"Why, I'm getting used to it," LN replied good naturedly.

"It makes you look different."

"All the better to fool people with." She laughed. She sat down in an easy chair.

The lines beside Southgate's eyes crinkled. "I saw you jogging on campus this morning as usual, earphones and all. That's great. It's important for us to keep our normal routines as much as possible."

"Elvie still needs his exercise."

"I'd like to talk to you about Elvie," Southgate said.

LN eyed him carefully. She never knew quite what to expect these days. Southgate read her suspicions. Then, suddenly, a pixieish expression fanned out across her face and she giggled. "Do you want him to bury his bones in the tunnel?"

"I want to use him, but not that way," Southgate replied straightfaced.

"How then?" LN was serious again.

"I want to train him for a role later on when we contact the television networks." Southgate brought out a small black suede bag from a desk drawer. He handed it to LN. "I want to teach him to retrieve that."

LN fondled the bag. "How soon?"

"Two weeks, say." His voice had a questioning tone. "We've twenty-eight days left until the Trimble's return."

"Will the tunnel be done in two weeks?"

Southgate rested an arm on the desk. He thought for a moment, then said cautiously, "Togo thinks we can dig out about three feet an hour if the texture of the soil doesn't change. He worries more about the shoring. That seems to go slower."

"It's like painting a house," LN put in. "The flat work goes fast. It's the trim that seems interminable."

"Well put." His eyes were pale, like watery diamonds. He would have loved a nap before starting work on the tunnel again. "How about Elvie?"

"We can try."

"Good. Take him with you to the Trimble's. I see nothing wrong with that. You can work with him in their back yard."

"The sooner I get started, the better, of course."

Southgate nodded. He changed the subject. "Togo and I will be coming out in my car tonight. Gershon wanted his van. We'll park in the shopping center lot and walk over to the house."

"What time?"

"As soon as its dark."

LN stood and walked over to Southgate. She gave him a light peck on the cheek. "See you then," she said. The bag dangled from her hand.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Twenty-five

That night, the first hour's digging went well again. They advanced three feet as Togo predicted.

Togo worked the lance and Southgate the muck dispenser. LN kept watch on the circuit breaker box and the pool. The first section of power line was strung along the tunnel roof. Southgate hammered a nail half way into a support frame and clamped a small, portable floodlight to it.

Illumination filled the passage. The fan was brought to the entrance and turned on. The air inside had become dank. Southgate checked the drain and found it handling the run-off efficiently.

Togo took a compass reading, then started the lance again. His direction was straight ahead now with five feet of topsoil above him. The stream of water cut into the dirt and splattered mud on him. As he moved, his shadow, a distorted and grotesque form from the floodlight behind him, played on the walls. Water squished beneath his knees as he knelt to keep his head from hitting the roof.

It was a miserable place to work.

Two hours later Togo had dug away another six feet. He emerged from the tunnel cramped and wet while Southgate sucked up the remaining muck. Southgate, too, was stiff and watery.

"Jesus, it's confining in there," he moaned as he crawled out into the basement.

"Think we'll ever get used to it?" Togo questioned.

"We'll endure," Southgate replied. "But we'll never get used to it."

Togo dried himself with a towel. "It's eleven-fifteen," he said rubbing his face. "What's your pleasure?"

"Are you tired?"

"No."

"Let's keep going then. I'll work the lance for a while."



"How about me?" LN put in.

"We need you. You must keep an eye on things out here," Southgate said. "We can't hear anything in the tunnel but ourselves."

"All right. But, how about the lights? I think I should turn the ones upstairs off. It's late."

"I do too," Togo said.

Southgate looked around the room. "The basement should be blacked out. We should have a covering over those windows so no one can peek in."

"Let me look around," LN said. She climbed the stairs as Southgate and Togo re-entered the tunnel. In her bedroom, she found the answer. She flipped back the spread of her bed and picked up the pillows. As an afterthought, she removed the cases.

In the Trimbles' bedroom, she garnered one more since there were three basement windows. Her arms full, she flicked the light switch with one finger. As she descended through the house, she did the same with lights along the way until she was back in the cellar again.

She paused for breath. She measured a window with her eye and then look at the pillows. They appeared to be the same size. It would be nice, she thought, if the pillows are just a little larger. She walked over to the closest window and thrust the edge of a pillow onto its ledge. Then, stretching up on her toes, she stuffed it against the pane.

The fit was snug. She heaved a sigh of relief and repeated the act at the two other windows. Then she pulled the shade that was already on the door.

That should do it, she thought to herself.

LN inspected the circuit breaker box and the drain in the utility room, then checked the water level in the pool. The hum of the motors was the only sound, but it wasn't loud. For the first time, LN realized how noisy and smelly gasoline engines would have been.

Definitely not suitable, she thought.

The sleds carrying the pumps and motors were right at the tunnel entrance now and would soon be inside. Fumes from a gasoline operated pump would have only added to the misery.

LN sat down on the steps. In time, her chin fell forward and she dozed until it was time for her next tour of inspection. Finally, the two men crawled from the tunnel. They saw the pillows. "Masterful improvisation," Southgate told her. Togo nodded agreement.

"Yeah, but what do I sleep on?" she asked. "Why not cut plywood covers?"

"I'll do them tomorrow afternoon," Togo said. LN smiled in approval. "Shall we close down?" he asked, turning toward Southgate. LN glanced at her watch. It was one-thirty.

"I'd say we've done a good night's work," Southgate replied.

"Let's call it quits. We'll begin tomorrow night with the shoring."

Togo hesitated. "Brax, maybe we're tempting fate. Maybe we're chancing a cave-in by leaving the roof without shoring for a whole day."

Southgate rubbed his eye as he weighed the situation. He knew everyone was tired. It would take at least another hour to put up shoring. His face hardened. "I appreciate your warning, Togo," he said. "But, it's late and we're sleepy. Let's take the gamble and stop."

"You're the boss," Togo responded.

Nineteen hours passed. LN met Southgate and Togo at the door when they arrived on foot from the shopping center parking lot. Under his arm, Togo carried three neatly cut pieces of plywood to blackout the basement windows.

LN wore a big smile. "The tunnel is still there," she informed them happily. "It didn't fall in."

"Then Let's get to work," Southgate said.

He and Togo quickly changed into their working clothes. "We've a choice now," Togo said as he pulled on his boots. "Should we dig out another eight feet or put up shoring?"

Across the room, LN blacked out the windows.

"My God, Togo, make up your mind," Southgate jibed. "Last night you feared the tunnel would collapse without shoring. Now you want to go another eight feet."

"It's the overlapping of the plywood sheets, Brax," Togo replied calmly. "We need twelve feet to do that. Each one of them is eight feet long, you know."

"Do you think the dirt will hold off collapsing just because we're in the tunnel?" Southgate asked.

Togo's voice hardened a fraction. "You gambled last night."

"We weren't in the tunnel then."

Togo shrugged. "O.K. Let's put up the shoring,"

LN watched them. She'd seen them dispute issues before, as only close friends can, without rancor. Now, they turned their full attention to carrying the shoring into the tunnel. They slipped through the entrance into the deeper darkness. Ahead, they could see the floodlight fall on the grayish dirt. The air was sticky.

Southgate, who was in the lead, twisted his head back over a shoulder and yelled to Togo. "Tell LN to turn on the fan." Then, he started forward again, dragging a support. Soon, he felt the air begin to circulate.

Southgate leaned his support against the face of the tunnel and started back out. He met Togo bringing in another support.

"Let's only put up two supports," Southgate said. "They'll hold the plywood sheet until we've dug farther and are ready to overlap."

"Fine."

The plywood came next. It was more difficult and cumbersome than either had expected. Southgate could feel the sweat on his back. "This is a bitch," he muttered. Togo heard him, but made no response. For the first time, he had doubts that the two of them could dig the tunnel alone.

They leaned the plywood against the last eight feet of wall.

"O.K.," said Southgate. He gulped a breath of air. "Let's roll the plywood over. I'll hold it up and you slip the first support under."

Togo nodded. The working space was small. Both men were on their knees. With great effort they twisted the plywood sheet until it was over them, then maneuvered it into place. Togo dropped one arm and quickly pulled the support into place. Southgate scrambled forward pushing the plywood higher as he went.

"Is it holding at your end," he shouted to Togo.

"Still upright," Togo replied.

"Can you get a nail in if I hold it straight up from here?"

"Give me a few seconds," Togo answered. He reached in his pocket with one hand and pulled out the nail. He thrust it between his lips. Then he picked up the hammer from the tunnel floor.

Southgate's arms began to weaken. He felt them grow numb as the blood left. He gritted his teeth and pushed up again, praying he wouldn't get a cramp. Then he heard Togo give the nail several light taps and finally drive it home with heavy blows.

Southgate lowered the sheet slowly until it rested on his head. Then he dropped his arms. Togo crawled up beside him. "We'd better put a nail into the next support, too, temporarily," he said. Southgate lifted his arms and pushed the plywood against the dirt roof. Togo slipped the support in place and nailed.

"That was damned difficult," Southgate said, dropping his arms again.

"Do you think LN could help?" Togo asked.

"She can try."

"Well, let's cut out the next four feet and then see."

The soil continued to fall away easily. In just over an hour, they'd drilled another four feet. Southgate pulled out his compass, steadied it, and took a reading.

"Still on course?" Togo inquired.

"Straight as an arrow," Southgate replied, slipping the instrument back into his pocket. He sighed. "Let's try overlapping the plywood."

Outside again, Togo and Southgate stacked several supports near the entrance. As they worked, Southgate called to LN, "I want you to go into the tunnel with us. We need your help with the shoring."

LN locked her eyes on him and shivered involuntarily. "Let me change this," she protested, pinching the blouse she wore with her bluejeans. "I've got an old sweater upstairs."

"How about your feet?"

"I bought a pair of old boots. They'll protect me."

By the time she returned, the plywood was in the tunnel. Southgate grabbed a support. "Come on," he said to her. "Follow me."

LN, a shower cap over her hair, stooped low and cautiously crossed the entrance threshold. She looked back once, then stepped forward. God, it's like being buried alive, she thought.

"Still there?" Southgate shouted without looking around.

"Right behind you."

The floodlit area up front was wet and slippery. Near the face, water still dripped from the newly cut roof. The going was hard and the closeness oppressive. For a moment, LN fought panic. Then, she became calm again. She look back. Togo was bringing up a support. He leaned it against one side and came forward.

"Cozy, isn't it," he said. A drop of water fell on his forehead. One of his legs slipped sideways on the slimy mud. His arm flew out and he braced himself against the wall. LN reached out to steady him. Mud splattered her cheek. She made no effort to wipe it off.

Southgate touched her shoulder. She turned. "See that last support," he said, pointing. She nodded. "We're going to take it down and slip in another layer of plywood. Half of it will cover new tunnel. Half of it will overlap the piece already up."

"Sounds tricky," LN said, her anxiety increasing.

"Our problem is lack of space. We don't have much room to maneuver," southgate answered darkly. He looked at Togo. "Ready?"

Togo raised his hand, his fingers and thumb in the form of an O, and slopped over to the support.

"LN, you get on the other side of him and hold the plywood up," Southgate directed her. "When Togo drops the support, I'll slide the second piece in."

LN moved cautiously, her feet slipping and sliding in the guck. The second she was in place, Togo yanked out the nail and banged the support against the wall. LN felt the weight over her increase. She struggled to hold the plywood steady. Southgate quickly pulled the second section of plywood toward him. He jammed it against the face of the tunnel.

"Pick up your end," he yelled to Togo.

Together, the two men heaved the section above their heads.

"Watch your hands," Togo shouted to LN as they struggled forward.

The warning came too late. The edge of the second section smashed into her knuckles. She staggered as pain shot through her fingers. Togo stumbled forward, holding up both pieces.



"Get the support up," he yelled to her. She scrambled by him on her knees, her eyes watering. She snatched the wooden frame and pitched it out into the tunnel behind him. "Wedge it in! Wedge it in!" Southgate instructed her.

Almost by reflex she pushed the support against the plywood. Togo felt the tension ease. He turned and helped her slam the support into place. "How's your end?" he cried out to Southgate.

"I'm O.K. Nail it home up there."

Southgate half crouched, was afraid to move. Almost all feeling was gone from his arms. Held on damn it, he muttered to himself. A bead of sweat trickled down his neck and tickled his skin. He had a desperate desire to scratch.

The sharp sound of Togo's hammer echoed through the passage.

As soon as it stopped, Southgate shouted, "Down here. Bring a support down here." His body quivered, every muscle taut with agony. His vision blurred and dizziness swept over him. He heard Togo call to LN, "Help Brax."

LN pushed the plywood against the roof. Togo slipped the support in flush with the face of the tunnel and nailed it in place. He looked back. The far end of the board had bowed away from its companion. He walked, duck-like, to the trouble and nailed them together.

Southgate dangled his arms and squeezed his fingers as he sat in the mud, his legs stretched out in front of him and his back against the tunnel. "We're going to have to make some changes," he said, gasping for air. "We can't go through this everytime we re-enforce the roof."

LN sucked the scratches on her knuckles. Togo came up beside her.

"It almost got away from us, Brax," he said impassively.

Southgate nodded. "We've got to have more muscle," he said.

"Someone like Gershon," LN put in.

A stillness settled on them. Togo and Southgate glanced at each other. Both realized that Gershon Wingo was made to order for their needs. He was big and he was strong. His strength would make featherweights of the plyboard.

At length, LN broke the silence. "If you need me, I'm willing to work in the tunnel," she said.

"You're a help," Southgate said. "But you're still not enough."

Togo peered into the dimness. As wet and miserable as he felt, he wanted to continue. "It would be a shame to give up now," he said. "I'll talk to Gershon if you want me to."

Southgate beamed. "What are the chances he'll come aboard?" he asked.

"We're not in a position to weigh them," Togo replied. "We simply take the risk."

"You're right," Southgate said. He let out a little chuckle.

"If we get him, we'll also get his van. That will be handy, too."

He paused, then his voice became firm. "Talk to him," he told Togo.

"Check."

"What do we do the rest of the night?" LN asked.

"What we apparently do best," Southgate replied. "Dig."

"We could go another nine or ten feet before we quit," Togo said.

"We need that kind of room to work anyway," Southgate said. "We'll always have to be ten or twelve feet ahead of the shoring. We can't avoid it." He looked at Togo and smiled wryly. "You were right," he said.

"Will you still need me in the tunnel?" LN asked.

"You can go back into the basement," Southgate told her.

LN put her hand against the wall and pushed herself up. Slouching, she moved toward the entrance. Togo and Southgate checked the shoring again. For good measure, Togo drove several extra nails through the supports into the plywood. Then, they moved the pumps deeper into the tunnel.

"I'll talk to Gerhson tomorrow," Togo said.

"As early as you can. We'll need him first thing," Southgate reminded him.

Togo opened the lance. Its small pressurized stream of water tore into the face of the tunnel. The dirt fell away as pulverized mush. A half hour passed. Togo turned off the lance. "I've got to take a break," he said.

"I might as well go with you," Southgate said.

They gulped in the fresh air of the basement. Togo took off his rubber boots and went upstairs in his stocking feet. As his footsteps faded, LN turned to Southgate. "I worked with Elvie for an hour with the bag before dark."

"How'd it go?"

"Good. At the end he actually found it and brought it back to me once. Of course, it could have been pure coincidence."

Togo came back down the steps carrying a small camp stool. "I found this in the back hall," he said. He unfolded it and sat down. "I don't see why we can't use this in the tunnel. It will make working the lance more comfortable."

"I agree," Southgate said. "Bring it along."

Togo awoke early the next morning, anxious to seek out Gershon. If he had any qualms about the approach, the stiffness in his legs and the ache in his back quickly dispelled them. Although it was only seven-fifteen on a Saturday morning, he picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hello," a sleepy voice answered on the sixth ring.

"Gershon, this is Togo."

"Jesus, Togo, it's barely dawn."

"Come on, you big bear, it's almost seven-thirty."

"So? It's Saturday."

"I have to talk to you. How about breakfast? The meeting might change your whole life."

"For better or for worse?"

"Don't be so particular." He paused and thought a moment. "Meet me at The Huddle in forty minutes. I'll buy you as many eggs as you want."

"Is The Huddle open on Saturday?"

"It's open around the clock. Come on, get out of bed."

"All right, Togo. Only for you."

The phone clicked in Togo's ear. He hung up gently and dressed. The Huddle was a college hangout which he knew would be deserted on a Saturday morning. He'd already ordered coffee when Gershon arrived.

"Look, if you want to use my van again, it's yours," Gershon said, lowering himself into the booth. "It isn't necessary to buy me breakfast. Especially on a Saturday morning."

"It isn't the van, it's a lot more," Togo said seriously. "If you agree to the rest, the van will be included automatically."

Gershon studied his close friend. What's this all about, he thought, curiously unsettled. He waited for Togo to continue. But the waitress, a grandmotherly type with purple tinted hair, intervened. "Would you like to order?" she asked, setting a glass of water in front of him.

Gershon hesitated a moment, Togo said, "I've already ordered." Then he went ahead. "I'd like the steak plate with eggs, over easy, and the hash browns. Also a side order of grits."

"Coffee?"

"Yes, ma'am. The sooner the better."

The waitress left and returned immediately with a glass coffee pot. Steam rose from the liquid as she poured. When she'd gone, Togo leaned forward. "I don't know exactly how to start," he said. "This is ticklish."

"Are you in trouble?" Gershon broke in.

"Not in the ~~sense~~ you mean. Let's say I could use your help in a troublesome situation."

Gershon's eyes softened. "I owe you one. I told you that in Nam."

"This is more complicated than just returning a favor," Togo explained. "It's not something I have a right to ask you to do blindly. You're entitled to refuse."

Togo could see Gershon's mind churning. His expression hadn't changed, but his eyes had. They were wider and more alert. Togo took a sip of coffee while he thought.

For a few moments, he had memories again of Viet Nam. Not of the fighting. Togo hadn't been a part of it. He'd gone there in the summer of 1972 with a team of geologists for a small, but highly respected, exploration firm, the Opal Oil Well Company of Denver, to follow up quietly on reports of significant oil reserves along the South Viet Nam coastline. Opal was subcontractor to a large French-American consortium, which in reality was dominated by one of America's largest oil companies.

The war was out of control by then. Sarah had fought his departure, even though the venture was only for three months and his pay almost equaled a year's salary at Delta. She was more interested in her husband being alive and poor than dead and rich. The differences had been a further strain on their marriage, perhaps, in retrospect, the point of no return.

The team was assured that the areas in which it worked were secure. They weren't, as it turned out. Nothing was. Togo and the others were under frequent sniper fire and harrassment by Viet Cong guerrillas. Finally, after much dickering, a squad of American soldiers was detailed to guard the geologists. Among them was Corporal Gershon Wingo, a big, muscular man who held the army wrestling championship and who, Togo discovered, also liked to paint and was gentle as a lamb.

Gershon and Togo, to each other's amazement, became fast friends. But the episode which cemented their relationship forever came on a moonless night when Gershon was ambushed by guerillas on his way to the latrine.

The geologists had just established a base camp in a new section north of Cam Ranh Bay. Togo heard the commotion and rushed to help. Together, he and Gershon, beat off the Viet Cong. Togo always thought there were only three guerillas. Gershon insisted there were more and credited Togo with saving his life.

The coffee aroma twitched Togo's nostrils. He could feel Gershon's eyes boring in. Togo knew the big man trusted him. He'd brought him to Delta after Nam. "As I said, Gershon, I'll understand if you rebuff me," Togo repeated.

"I think you're trying to convince me of it before I even hear your offer," Gershon said, meaning it.

"Good God, no," Togo exclaimed. "Without you, I don't think we can continue."

"What is it then?" Gershon insisted.

"Let me explain it all," Togo said and launched into his account.

Gershon's eyes became wider as Togo talked. He sat dead-still, spellbound. Christ Jesus, he kept muttering under his breath as he heard the flow of Togo's words. When Togo stopped, he said, astounded, "I never even suspected."

"We hope no one does," Togo retorted. "But, you understand now the dangerous game we're in."

Gershon nodded. Suddenly, he no longer saw his close friend as a placid professor, but in a new light as somewhat of a twentieth century free booter and buccaneer.



"I want to help," Gershon said. His voice trembled with excitement.

"It's settled then." Togo took another swallow of coffee, by now lukewarm.

"What's my first mission?" Gershon asked.

"To eat a big breakfast," Togo replied. "We need all the strength you can muster."

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Twenty Six

Southgate was out of bed as early as Togo and Gershon. After a quick breakfast of melon, a sweetroll and coffee, he drove to the parking lot across from Graceland. From there, he called LN to pick him up.

"I'm ready to take another step," he said after he was settled into his seat in her red Triumph. "Let's drive around some while I explain it."

LN pulled up to U.S. 51 and stopped to wait for a break in the traffic. When it came, she turned south and roared away.

"Any word on Gershon?" she asked, once in the cruising gear.

"Togo's at breakfast with him. It'll have been decided one way or the other by the time we get back."

"Is that why you wanted to take the drive?"

"Partly. Also to get out in the fresh air and sunshine some. If Gershon agrees to help, we'll spend alot time in that tunnel this weekend."

LN slowed for a traffic light but as she neared, it turned green. She resumed speed. The car moved smoothly. It was aging but well kept, the engine sounds in perfect synchronization.

"Gershon would make a big difference," she said.

Southgate added his thought. "A human hydraulic jack, I'd say." He gazed out of the window at the tall southern pines as the car streaked along. They reached the crest of a hill and dipped down through the hollow.

At length, Southgate half turned toward LN. "We have to keep looking ahead," he said. "It's time to order our frequency hoppers. We can't wait until the last minute to do it."

"But we won't need them until the tunnel is done."

"We've got to avoid any delays in shipping. It would be foolhardy to wait until the tunnel is dug."

"I agree with that," LN replied, her eyes still on the road ahead. "I thought we could postpone the order a few more days though."

"I'd rather not," Southgate said.

"All right. What's the modus operandi?" LN asked.

"It calls for another disguise. Can you raid the school drama department again? You'll need another wig and a cane. Also an old lady's dress."

LN laughed. "Brax, you'll have me playing so many roles, I won't know the real me any longer."

"LN, you're a good actress. None of us could do it half as well as you can."

"Why an old woman?"

"People never suspect them," Southgate replied evenly.

"Is the make-up a one time deal?"

"More. Perhaps three at the most."

"I should join the actors' union," LN quipped.

Southgate shifted in his seat. "Here's the way I see it. We'll order the hoppers directly from the maker, Lew Karickhoff & Company, in a town up north. Kennsington, Maryland, I think. The address is in my wallet. We'll pay by money order. Or, rather, by several money orders. We'll need a half a dozen. I think its best to order them seperately so one large purchase doesn't stand out. We'll use mail-drops for delivery."

"Six different ones?" LN interjected.

"At least three. There are numerous telephone answering services in town. They all double as mail-drops for people. They charge about twenty dollars a month."

"Brax, if we're going to that, it might be a good idea to send three or four other boxes, phoney ones, to the same adresses. Then, the frequency hoppers wouldn't stand out so much."

"Good idea."

"What do I do today?"

"Get the orders off. The banks are open until noon. Specify delivery by United Parcel. If all goes well, we should have them in a week. When you think about it, that's none to soon."

"Couldn't I register with the answering services today, too?"

"If they're open. Otherwise do that on Monday. If it takes a personal visit, you'll have to have your disguise on first."

"Check."

Southgate settled back. The warmth of the sun's early rays slanting through the windshield felt good on him. For a few minutes, he enjoyed it, then glanced sideways toward LN. "We should turn around," he said.

"Yes. I'm anxious to hear about Gershon."

Just as LN's car reached the intersection of U.S. 51 and Dolan drive the light changed to red. As they sat waiting, the motor idling, a black Dodge van wheeled into the left lane of the highway heading south and turned in front of them on an early green.

Southgate shot up in his seat. "That's Gershon's," he cried out excitedly. "I saw Togo sitting on this side."

LN raced the engine. "Come on light, change." She tapped her fingers on the steering wheel, anxiously. The second the light switched to green she blew her horn even though the three cars in front of her began to move immediately.

"Nervous?" Southgate asked.

"Excited. Like you are. The van has to mean that Gershon's joined up with us."

The red Triumph scooted around the corner, LN rapidly shifting its gears. She sped by a half a dozen houses and made a quick turn into the driveway. The van was already there. Togo peered out at them, a broad smile on his face. Gershon leaned over him and waved jauntily.

"I hear you need help." His voice was a loud whisper.

LN and Southgate climbed out of her car, like Togo, all smiles.

Togo leaned out his window. "We'd better pull the van into the garage," he said casually. "There are some things in the back to unload."

LN disappeared into the house and a few moments later the heavy grinding sound of the garage door rolling upward greeted them. Gershon switched on the van engine and eased into the space ahead of him. LN, standing a few feet away, pushed the activator button and the door slid down again.

When Gershon stepped from the van, LN ran to his side and threw her arms around him. "Oh, we're so glad to see you." She gave him a tight squeeze. Southgate followed with a bear hug around the neck. Gershon grinned good naturedly.

"Togo's very persuasive," the big man said.

They all laughed happily. Southgate glanced at his watch. It read ten-fifteen. He began to calculate the possibilities. If all went well, they could dig through another forty feet by Sunday night. He turned to Togo. "What's in the van?" he asked.

"The model. Some supports. More plywood. A couple of card tables."

"Let's unload," Southgate said.

The card tables were set up side by side and pushed back against the wall several feet to the left of the tunnel entrance. The model was placed on them. Togo ran a strip of brown wrapping paper along the front edges and with a heavy red marker indicated the distance they'd already gone.

"We'll record our progress here," he said.

Gershon stooped down and peeked into the passage. After a few seconds, he turned and looked up at Southgate standing nearby. "Thank God, I'm not claustrophobic," he said thoughtfully.

"Or anti-social," Southgate came back with a chuckle. "We're really in each other's hip pocket in there."

Togo came forward. "With four of us, maybe we can dig and put up shoring at the same time," he said.

Southgate pondered his answer. "Perhaps at times we could," he said agreeably. "LN could clear away the muck. But she has other responsibilities, too. Most of today she'll be ordering the frequency hoppers."

"Maybe tomorrow then," Togo replied.

Southgate nodded.

The supports and plywood sheets were unloaded and stacked neatly in the basement. Togo checked the water level in the pool. "I'm going to change into my work clothes," he said and disappeared into the utility room.

"How about you, Gershon?"

"Mine are still in the van. I'll get them."

Southgate followed Togo into the utility room. When all of them were ready, they entered the tunnel in single file with Gershon in the middle. Southgate checked the shoring as they moved along. "It's holding up fine," he said.

"Our trouble is getting the plywood into place," Togo told Gershon. He reached up and hit the roof with his hand.

Gershon viewed the area. He walked forward and knelt on one knee. Then he spread his arms and pressed his palms against the plywood. He looked like Atlas holding up the world. Finally, he dropped his arms and turned to his companions.

"Once under the plywood, I can hold it up alone. I'm sure of that," he said. "The problem is to get my leverage."

"Brax and I could each hold an end while you crawled under the middle," Togo said. "We could jam in the supports while you held the sheet up."

Gershon thought for a moment. "That should work," he said at last.

Togo turned to Southgate. "What's your choice? Cover the exposed area with shoring or dig another ten feet first.?"

Southgate hesitated. He was sorely tempted to dig first. But, in the end, caution prevailed. "We'd better put up the shoring," he said. "That area has been roughed out now for ten hours." He pointed to the shoring overhead. "I know we left this part exposed for twenty four hours and made it. But I don't think we should do it again. The soil's too porous."



Togo remained silent. As a geologist, he was convinced after Thursday night that a cave-in was remote. He would have reversed the sequence, confident that the dirt overhead would hold. He smiled inwardly. He wondered what Southgate's attitude about the soil's porousness would have been if they'd been shoveling out the tunnel by hand. He might have reevaluated the soil's toughness when blisters covered his fingers. The hydraulic lance was deceptive. It made the soil appear weaker than it really was.

Togo moved back toward the entrance, followed by Gershon, to get the shoring. Southgate watched them, the floodlight reflecting off of his forehead. Finally, he made his own way to the opening. He waited there for Togo to hand him two supports, then he disappeared into the dimness dragging the U-shaped wooden frames behind him. Togo and Gershon followed with the plywood.

Southgate leaned the supports against the wall. Then he and Togo lifted the plywood sheet into place against the ceiling. Gershon, half walking, half crouching, moved in underneath and knelt. He spread his arms and pressed his hands against the wood.

"Okah. Let go," he yelled.

The plywood didn't budge. Southgate and Togo quickly pushed the supports in place and nailed them. The operation had been flawless. The three men were jubilant. A muffled cheer drifted out into the basement.

Southgate turned on the pumps. "Let's move ahead," he shouted crisply. His manner was that of a man whose problem had been solved. Togo took the lance and sat down on his camp stool. Gershon looked at Southgate.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

"Two things. There's a circuit breaker box in the utility room. Check on the wires periodically." Gershon nodded. "Secondly, it's time to bring in our air hose. It's against the wall on the far side of the basement. Attach it to the fan and run it in along the ceiling."

"Gotcha."

The corrugated plastic hose Gershon found was cut in ten foot sections. It was four inches in diameter, pliable and used in households for the exhaust pipe on clothes dryers. Gershon handled it as though it were licorice candy. He looped it up from the fan and inside the entrance, where he afixed it to the plywood with strips of heavy plastic tape.

As Gershon moved deeper into the tunnel, it looked like an undulating white caterpillar was following him.

The cooler air was like a light trade wind when it reached the inner tunnel. Togo felt it immediately on his back. "Hey, that feels good," he shouted back through the passage. Gershon heard him as he moved along checking the hose.

Southgate put his face in front of the opening for a few seconds.

Soon, he returned to sucking up the muck. Togo had removed his boots and set them on the sled holding the big pump. The dirt and water swirled around his ankles as the stream from the lance bore into the surface ahead of him.

Southgate sloshed around him, hose in hand, like a housewife with her portable vacuum cleaner. Gershon watched for a time, then left to inspect the circuit breaker box."

"Check the drain, too," Southgate yelled over his shoulder.

Gershon returned a few minutes later to report everything was functioning properly. After a time, Southgate stripped to the waist. He was hot despite the fan. Later, Togo did the same.

They worked for three more hours. Both stripped to their undershorts, then continued for three more hours, digging and putting up shoring.

"I feel like a shriveled up prune," Togo said when he finally shut down the pump operating the lance.

Southgate continued to clean up the muck for several more minutes, then cut off his pump. Togo took another compass reading. His sixth of the day.

"Still straight as arrow," he reported.

Gershon came up behind them. "LN's back," he said. "She wants to know about dinner."

Southgate glanced at his co-workers. "How long will it take us to put up the next stretch of shoring?"

Togo turned to Gershon. "Did she say how long it will take her to fix the meal?"

"About an hour, maybe a little longer."

"Tell her to go ahead," Southgate said. "We should be through by then."

Gershon talked to LN at the entrance to the tunnel, then rejoined Southgate and Togo. Earlier, while the others dug, he'd assembled the supports and plywood needed for the section. He'd also filled in the gaps in the earlier sections until there was a support every sixteen inches.

"It's beginning to look like a cathedral," Southgate said glancing back.

"Or the cloistered walk of a monastery," piped up Togo helpfully.

"Yeah, just look at us," said Gershon. "The mud monks."

The tunnel was quiet, as if they'd suddenly all taken a vow of silence. Their break was over. Gershon put his hand under the last sheet of plywood in place and Southgate knocked out the temporary support. Quickly, he and Togo slipped a new section into place and while Gershon steadied it, new supports were pounded into place. They then moved on.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Twenty-seven

The spicy aroma of pot roast wafted into the utility room as the men cleaned up for dinner.

"I'm starved," Gershon said as he washed the grime from his face.

Togo stuck his head under the faucet. Muddy water ran off into the sink. Southgate waited anxiously, mud plastered to his forehead.

"Soup's on," LN invited from the top of the basement stairs.

"Maybe it would be better to eat right here in the basement," Southgate said. "Then we could leave the muck on us. We'll just accumulate more when we go back in the tunnel tonight."

"Let's not this time," Togo pleaded, a sympathetic note to his voice. "LN's gone to some trouble to cook for us. She'd be disappointed if we didn't all sit down together."

Togo stepped over the drain and let the slow trickle from a hose wash over his body. Southgate took his turn at the faucet. "You're right," he sputtered through the mist as water surrounded his head. "We owe her our company on a Saturday night." He reached out his hand for a towel, his eyes half closed by water.

Gershon handed him one. His vision cleared, Southgate took the hose from Togo and bathed his back and chest. "God, it does feel good to be clean again," he said breezily.

Upstairs they found the table tastefully set in the kitchen with matching cloth and napkins. "I thought we'd be less conspicuous out here," she explained. The three men nodded in unison. Southgate pulled out a chair for her. A large pot roast decorated the middle of the table with brown potatoes, candied carrots and buttered onions in serving dishes around it. There was also a basket of hot rolls.

"In Wabasha, this was known as a thresher's dinner," Southgate said jokingly.

"Some spread," Gershon chimed in. He looked at the food, then said, "Would someone be kind enough to pass me the potatoes."

Southgate reached out for the serving dish and handed it to him. He turned to LN. "How did it go with the frequency hoppers?"

"The orders are in, three in all. Two hoppers each. I got the money orders at a bank on the other side of the airport. I was able to arrange for mail drops with the answering services by phone."

"What name did you use?"

"I used three different ones. The Bates Electric company. The East Memphis Radio Club and Razorback Electronics, Inc. The last one is coming to an answering service across the river in West Memphis, Arkansas." LN smiled. "Not bad, eh."

"Perfect," Southgate said. His voice sounded with praise.

The table became quiet as the four conspirators ate. Southgate let the silence gather. At length, he said, "There's something else we have to settle. That's the way we're going to move Carrie Westfall over here."

Gershon's mouth stopped chewing. He was startled. Southgate watched him, his eyes straight and unblinking. "Hasn't Togo summerized our plans for you," Southgate asked, turning directly toward him.

"Well, yes," Gershon replied. "But, I don't believe he mentioned that."

"It's time to lay it out, then" Southgate said. He explained his promise to Gleamer and ended with, "He doesn't know, of course, that we're keeping the body."

"How are we going to get it here, Brax?" Togo asked. "You've never explained that."

"We can use the van." He turned to Gershon. "Can't we?"

"Certainly."

"That's the easy part, of course. The difficult task will be getting her out of the ground."

Togo spoke up. "Why not use the hoist on a tow truck."

"I could borrow the wrecker from Olson's garage," Gershon said. "The parts manager is a good friend of mine. I'm sure he'd let me use it some night."

"What excuse would you give?" LN asked.

The others were silent. Gershon sat for a moment and thought. "The one I like best," he said, "would be to get an old car to tow in. I've done that before, then worked on it in the garage. Nothing unusual that way."

"So far, it sounds good," Southgate said.

"I vote for it," LN volunteered.

"So do I," Togo said. "I think the idea will work."

Southgate nodded. "That's what we'll try then. Gershon will you need advance notice to get the Olson's tow truck?"

"A few hours. The garage closes at six o'clock every night during the week and at noon on Saturday. I'd have to make the arrangements during the day, then go around and pick it up at closing time."

"We wouldn't move Carrie until the tunnel's done," Southgate said. "It's a relief to know how we're going to do it, though. A big relief." He ~~lifted~~ his glass and took a long drink of water.

Togo turned to LN. "This has been a wonderful dinner."

"I, too, compliment you," Gershon said. "I'm rejuvenated."

Not to be outdone, Southgate added his praise. "Just what the ~~doctor~~ ordered for three weary workers," he said. He looked first at Togo, then Gershon. "Can we go on?"

"I'm ready," said Togo.

Gershon pushed back his chair and stood up. "I'll lead the way."



After the men had returned to the basement, LN cleared the dishes from the table and loaded the dishwasher. After turning it on she took the suede bag and went out into the backyard with Elvie. Night had fallen and she put the dog through his paces in darkness for the first time. Beneath them, the tunnelers were at work again. She listened, but heard nothing.

The men took turns operating the lance in the next stretch of tunnel. This gave them all a chance to sit down on the camp stool, without a doubt the only half way comfortable position in the passage for any of them. They continued to progress at roughly three feet an hour and a little after ten-thirty that night they passed sixty feet.

As they moved deeper into the earth, they pulled the pumps behind them with a thick rope. The heavy wooden underframes lumbered through the mud like sleds with rusty runners cutting across mushy ice. Wires carrying the power for the pumps and floodlight had to be extended constantly, as did the plastic pipe blowing in the fresh air from the fan.

Stray rocks, a few as large as chicken eggs, were tossed into a burlap bag for removal later.

They worked stripped to their shorts again. The raincoats worn earlier had become too warm and uncomfortable. When they put up the shoring they donned protective gloves and boots. They were a comic sight in their strange combinations of nudity and covered extremities.

As they swashed about, their wet bodies glistened in the vaporous glow of the floodlight. Mud was everywhere and when they brushed the sides of the passage it left its mark on them. No one escaped the water. It splattered back off of the face of the tunnel as the lance cut forward into the loess, then dripped from the roof like rows of leaky showers.

The canvas seat of the camp stool became saturated and water squished about inside their underclothes when they sat on it.

The fan became less effective as the distance between it and their operational location increased. The air became heavier as they moved on.

"Should we knock it off?" Toge asked. "We've made good progress. We can still get a good night's sleep if we quit now."

Without hesitation, Southgate answered, "Let's close down."

Togo welcomed the words. He began to hum, then sing, "Take my body, take my soul, Take my body with the rock and roll." Southgate listened for a moment, then joined in. The lyrics floated through the tunnel. "Take my body, take control, take my body and make me whole."

Gershon picked up the tune. Southgate hunched over, walked back and shut down the pumps. The singing became louder. Gershon picked up the words. All three of them were together, "Take my body, take my soul, take my body with the rock and roll."

With Southgate in the lead, they began to wend their way out of the tunnel. Gershon was behind him, followed by Togo. As they neared the entrance, their voices rose, a combination of euphoria over stopping for the night and a day's work well done. Outside the portal, they unbent and threw their arms around one another, still singing.

When the song was over, Togo walked to the model and recorded their penetration. They'd dug out sixty-four feet. The men spent the night on army cots alined against the wall beside the tunnel. LN continued to live upstairs in her official role as house sitter.

Sunday dawned gray and cloudy with the possibility of rain. The men were up early. The weather outside made no difference. It would always be the same inside the tunnel. Southgate looked over the pile of shoring supports. He was sure there were enough for one more day, then they'd have to put together some more frames at Togo's house. The stack of plywood was plentiful.

Gershon went inside and took the first compass reading of the day. Next several sections were added to the hose connected to the fan to bring fresh air farther inside the passage. Togo talked some about a second fan farther inside the tunnel later simply for circulation.

Southgate ran the lance first, then Gershon. At mid-morning, LN took over for the first time. This freed Togo and Gershon to put up shoring. Southgate ran the muck pump.

LN sat on the camp stool in a pair of cut off bluejeans, and a halter, plus a bathing cap. The men wore their shorts. The earth fell away in front of them as LN played the pressurized water line against it. Next to her Southgate sucked up the muck and it rucked back through the hose to the drain. Steadily, they pushed forward, pulling the pumps and wiring with them.

They ate lunch in shifts, first Togo and Gershon, then LN and Southgate. About four-thirty, LN gave the lance to Togo and went upstairs to the kitchen to prepare spaghetti for dinner. She chose the Italian dinner because it would be filling. She pondered making garlic bread for a few minutes and then went ahead. We'll all be in the same boat, she thought to herself, we'll all smell of garlic together. She remembered one morning in Paris years ago. It was early September and she was visiting France with her parents. They were walking near Notre Dame when the odor of garlic permeated the air. Soon, a class of thirty school girls marched around the corner in their black skirts and white blouses. A cloud of garlic hung over them, then faded away as they disappeared down the street.

LN smiled at the memory as she continued her cooking.

In the tunnel, the pressurized water continued to eat away the soil. Gershon crawled into the basement to check the water level in the swimming pool, then, for good measure, felt the circuit breaker box. The latter was done infrequently now. The original fear of an electrical fire had disappeared.

He turned the hose leading into the swimming pool on harder. By the time dinner was over, the pool would be filled to the brim again.

LN's dinner eased away the stress of the long day and the men returned to the tunnel gastronomically content and eager to work again.

Southgate wanted to drill another twelve feet, a distance that would take them over the half way mark. Togo ran the lance for an hour. Then, LN returned and continued the drilling while Togo sucked up the muck. Behind them. Southgate and Gershon nailed up the shoring.

Two hours later, Southgate tapped her on the shoulder. "Can you keep going?" he asked.

"Could I take a short break?"

Southgate motioned to Gershon, who sat resting on the edge of the sled holding the lance pump. The big man came forward.

"Take LN's place for a few minutes," Southgate told him.

LI turned off the lance and eased off of the camp stool. Gershon sat down and pointed the lance at the face of the tunnel. The narrow stream of water jumped out and peeled away the dirt. Inch by inch, the tunnel lengthened.

Water dripped from the roof onto Gershon's head. He wiped a drop from his eye and continued to play the stream on the dirt ahead. The ghostly mist reflected in the rays of the floodlight, dull originally, then brighter.

Southgate, at work beside Gershon with the muck hose, noticed the change first. He nudged his co-worker.

"Look, the face is getting lighter."

Gershon leaned forward on his stool and squinted into the opaque haze.

"The water's clearer," he said. A puzzled look crossed his face. "There's less dirt mixed in."

Southgate slouched back to Togo, who'd just finished nailing in a support. "Can you come up front?" he asked.

"Trouble?"

"Don't know."

Togo looked ahead. He moved in beside Gershon and studied the situation. "Cut the water," he directed. When the stream stopped, he went up the tunnel face and dug in his fingers. The scratch of his nails told him the answer. He turned around.

"Rock," he said.

Southgate and Gershon rushed forward. "How much?" Southgate yelled.

"No way to tell."

"Shit."

They stood in the muddy slush listening to the water drop, suddenly aware of their misery. Togo wiped the sweat from his face. "Turn the water on again," he said.

Rivulets streamed down the surface, increasingly clearer, until the men could see the wall of stone. LN came up behind them.

"I'm back," she said.

Southgate spoke up. "To a real headache." He pointed in front of them. "Rock, Damn it! Rock."

"Alot?"

Southgate shrugged. "I don't know," he said irritably.

She persisted. "Can we cut through?"

Togo said quickly, "The lance will eat it up, but it will be slower going. We've hit an outcropping of sandstone. I suggest we quit for the night. Tomorrow I'll bring in a drill. It might be easier to blow through it with nitrogen gas."

"It would certainly be quicker, wouldn't it?" Southgate asked.

"I think so."

"Time is a factor."

"Could there be many of these?" LN asked.

"They're very localized," Togo said. "There aren't too many around here. Unfortunately, one of them is in our way."

"Is it hard rock?"

"Well, with the tools we have, no. It's sand and gravel cemented together by iron from ground water."

LN forced a weary smile. "We were doing so well."

"It's been a very productive two days," Southgate said. "Let's turn off the equipment and come back fresh tomorrow night." He looked at LN. "We'll leave you here alone tonight."

They left the tunnel when everything was in order. In the basement, Togo brought the chart on the model up-to-date. They'd gone a total of roughly one hundred and six feet. A half hour later, the garage door opened and the van coasted down the driveway and into the street. The rest of the neighborhood was dark.

\*\*\*\* \*



## Chapter Twenty Eight

Mid-afternoon the next day, Togo and LN drove to the Trimble's house in the van. In the garage, they unloaded a portable Rock-Splitter borrowed from the college geology department and together wheeled it into the tunnel along with a cylinder of nitrogen gas. It was Togo's belief that the rock barrier they'd encountered would crumble like an oatmeal cookie when subjected to a combined force of water and gas of approximately seven thousand five hundred pounds per square inch.

Initially, using a rotary hammer drill with a carbide bit, he painstakingly bored dozens of small holes twelve inches deep into the rock. By the time he'd finished a grid on the face of the tunnel, Southgate and Gershon arrived. They watched as he inserted the spear of the Rock-Splitter into the first hole, filled it with water and gas, opened the high pressure valve, then withdrew.

"That's it?" Gershon asked bewildered.

Togo nodded.

"But there's no blast," Gershon protested.

Togo turned and smiled. "That's the beauty of it," he said. "It's noiseless. No one can hear us."

Gershon shook his head. Togo continued to insert and withdraw the spear. Small chunks of rock fell away as he moved. Gershon and Southgate cleared them away. When the last break was completed, Togo released the pressure.

"Well, we know it's more than a foot thick," Southgate said philosophically as the three men stared at the solid sheet of rock still in front of them.

"Let's take another slice," Togo said.

He got the drill and began boring again. This time, Gershon and Southgate spelled him. When the grid was finished, they worked the Rock-Splitter again. Inside each twelve inch hole, ninety thousand pounds of pressure exploded without a sound. Another foot broke away.

Again, a sheet of rock faced them.

"Jesus, wonder if it's this way from now on," Southgate lamented.

"That's doubtful," Togo said.

"You keep saying that."

"And I believe it. The earth in these parts just isn't that rocky."

"What now?"

"We take another foot."

Gershon picked up the drill and began still another series of borings.

Progress was slower now. Time appeared to drag. It seemed to Southgate that they fought for every inch. He longed to eat away the loess again with the hydraulic lance, mud and all. Doubts filled his mind about completing the tunnel if the rock persisted. He wanted to believe Togo when he insisted it wouldn't. Still, Southgate was uneasy.

Togo saw the fretfulness of his friend. He said, "Brax, be patient a little longer. Mark my word that suddenly the rock will end and we'll be staring at dirt again."

Southgate took the electric drill from Gershon and continued with the boring.

"The dirt spoiled us," Gershon said. He rubbed the back of his neck. "The drilling is tedious, hole after hole."

"This might continue for several more feet," Togo said.

He and Gershon fell silent. They watched Southgate drill. After a while, Togo relieved him and finished the grid. Gershon operated the Rock-Splitter first, then Southgate. They saw immediately that more rock lay beyond. Togo finished up the bottom half of the grid, then all three cleared away the split-up pieces.

Southgate began to drill again. He seemed resigned to the rock now.

Togo and Gershon sat talking on the sled of the lance pump. A trouble light flashed back in the tunnel. LN approached. "Want some coffee?" she asked.

"I'll have some," Togo replied.

Gershon shook his head.

"Slow goin', eh?" LN commented as she unscrewed the top to the thermos and filled a plastic cup.

Togo took a swallow. "The boring takes time. How are things upstairs?"

"I've just finished my workout with Elvie. He's getting very good with the suede bag."

"Once we get through this rock, we'll move fast again. We'll get back on schedule."

Gershon stood up. "I'll relieve Brax," he said, walking forward.

Southgate handed him the drill and came back to the sled.

"Coffee?" LN asked.

"It would hit the spot."

LN poured him a cup. "Anything else?"

"Nothing. Just hope for the end of the rock."

After a time, Togo took the drill from Gershon. When the grid was done, the Rock-Splitter cut away another foot. Togo shook his head. "It's thicker than I thought," he said.

"We've hacked away four feet," Southgate said.

Gershon picked up the drill and pressed it against the new surface. It bit in, then spurted forward.

"Hey, something has changed," he yelled. "Something collapsed in there. It went spongy all of a sudden."

Togo and Southgate rushed forward. Togo took the trouble light from LN and flashed its beam in the hole. "It looks darker at the end," he said. "Try another hole," he told Gershon.

Again, the carbide bit ground into the rock, then jumped forward.

"Hot damn," Togo yelled. With an effort he calmed himself and said, "I'll bet a thousand dollars there's less than a foot of rock left." He turned to Gershon. "Shut off the drill."

They crowded around to examine the bit. Southgate flicked a small piece of dirt off. "Look at this," he said as a broad grin spread across his face.

Gershon quickly drilled two more holes, then took the Rock-Splitter and knocked off a chunk about eight inches square. LN flashed the beam in the hole. Southgate reached in and scratched. "We've plunged through," he yelled. "I can feel dirt." He pulled his hand back along the rock. "There's about six inches left. No more."

Togo stepped up and felt the rock. "Yep."

Gershon began the drill again. The mood in the tunnel changed. There was a light hearted air about the work again. The grid seemed to go faster. When it was finished, Togo took the Rock-Splitter and systematically blew away one square at a time. The original section of dirt became larger.

"What a beautiful sight," IN squealed. "I never thought dirt would look so inviting."

The rock ended as suddenly as it began. The rock fell away, piece by piece, until a solid wall of dirt faced them again. They all stood in front of it, pawing and probing, until convinced there was no more rock ahead.

"The texture seems the same as before," Togo told them. "No harder, no softer. Let's get the hydraulic lance up here."

Gershon pulled the Rock-Splitter back and maneuvered it around the pumps. Its rubber tires rolled smoothly over the tunnel floor as he pushed it toward the basement. When he returned, Togo had set up the camp stool. The low, powerful hums of the two pump engines throbbed through the passage again.

Togo was already stripped to his shorts in anticipation of the mud and humidity. He sat down on the stool and turned on the lance. The high pressured stream tore into the loess.

"Eat it, baby, eat it," Togo called out.

The wet dirt slid to the floor. Soon sludge oozed outward. Southgate vacuumed it up with the muck hose. Everyone kept one eye on the tunnel face for more rock. But there was none.

After he'd gone three feet, Togo shut off the lance. Southgate and Gershon shoved the doghouse forward until it was flush against the face.

"Let's call it a night," Southgate said. "It's two-thirty."

They started from the tunnel. "That might be the most important seven feet we ever do," Togo said.

"What about the Rock-Splitter? Shall we leave it here?" Southgate asked.

"For a few days, yes," Togo responded. "No one needs it at school."

It was foggy when the van left the garage. As the sound of the motor faded down the street, LN felt her way along the darkened hall to her bedroom. She didn't want to risk turning on the lights.

Next door, Bob Rowan sat up in bed. He, too, listened to the motor fade away down the street. He shook his wife, Carol. "Someone just pulled out of Trimble's driveway," he said sleepily. "Should I take a look around over there?"

His wife glanced at the luminescent dial of the alarm clock on her dresser. "Honey, it's two-thirty."

"Precisely why I'm asking you," he answered.

"It's the brother of the woman who's staying there."

"How do you know?"

"She told us the day she moved in. She said he might come and go at odd times. Go back to sleep."

Bob Rowan slipped out of bed and went to the window. He stared out into the fog. Seeing nothing, he shrugged. As he slipped back under the blanket, his wife said drowsily, "I'll go over tomorrow night to see her."

"Good idea," her husband said.

Late the next afternoon, the four conspirators gathered in LN's townhouse. The men napped in preparation for the night's work while she prepared dinner. When they'd finished eating, LN left for the Trimble's alone in her car. The men followed shortly in Southgate's convertible, their trip timed to reach the Graceland shopping center just after dark.

They walked to the Trimble's from the shopping center without incident, meeting no one, and slipped into the house. They were changing their clothes in the basement utility room when the faint sound of the front doorbell chimes interrupted them.

Southgate gave Togo a worried glance. "We'd better check that out," he said, motioning his head toward the stairs. Seconds later, they sat on the top step in their stocking feet, listening behind the closed door.

"Why hello, Carol, won't you come in," they heard LN say. She sounded at ease. The front door closed. Togo shrugged his shoulders unknowingly. They continued to listen.



"It's nice to see you," LN said.

"I wondered how you were getting along."

"Just fine. Everything is going smoothly. Won't you sit down?"

The two women walked into the living room. Their voices moved farther away and became muffled. Southgate nudged Togo and motioned to him to return to the utility room.

"Who is it?" Gershon whispered.

"Someone named Carol," Southgate replied softly.

"Well, what should we do?" Togo asked. He, too, talked in a whisper.

Southgate was still for a moment. Finally, he asked, "Could they hear us working?"

"I don't think so," Togo replied. "We're more than a hundred feet into the earth."

"She might stay an hour or longer," Southgate said. "We can't lose that time. Let's go."

The men disappeared into the tunnel. Upstairs, LN entertained Carol Rowan.

"Would you like a cup of coffee or some tea?" she asked politely.

"Tea would be nice."

LN went into the kitchen. Shortly, she returned with a wooden tray carrying a pot of tea, cups and saucers, a bowl of sugar and several lemon slices, all of which she placed on a coffee table in front of the davenport.

"Have you heard from the Trimble's?" Carol asked.

LN poured the tea. "Nothing. I'm sure they're too busy having a good time to write even a postcard." She paused and handed her caller a cup. "You'd be more likely to hear than I."

"Not a word." Carol giggled. "They were so excited about the trip."

LN took a sip of tea. She wanted desperately to break away somehow and go down into the basement for a few minutes but no excuse came to her. She was sure everything was all right. She hadn't heard a sound after the doorbell rang. She was convinced now that the men had heard it too.

God, I hope so, she thought to herself, it would be unfortunate if one of them stumbled into the living room.

Carol's eyes wondered about the room. "Doesn't it get lonesome here night after night?" she asked.

"Oh, no," LN answered quickly. "It's such a pleasant house. My brother checks in frequently. I was thinking of having some friends over this coming weekend. Just two or three. Do you think the Trimble's would mind?"

"I don't know why."

"I'll see," LN said, pleased that she'd been able to broadcast the possibility of Southgate and Togo openly staying with her.

"I am glad you told me," Carol said. "Bob was all for looking around last night when he thought he heard a car. It was so silly of him."

"I appreciate his concern," LN said calmly. "Please thank him for me."

He must have heard the men leave, LN thought to herself. Well, tonight they're walking. He won't hear the van or anything else. She smiled at Carol. "More tea?"

In the tunnel the men were hard at work. After some initial apprehension they'd settled in, confident they couldn't be heard. Southgate refused to turn on the fan full speed, however, and the air in the tunnel was sultry and more overbearing than usual. The men took turns standing at the end of the air pipe.

No more rock had been encountered and their progress was at the old rate of three feet an hour again. Southgate hoped to finish by the weekend. The pressure of time was the one thing that annoyed him. He would be relieved when the digging was done. The rock had unnerved him. With each additional foot he heaved a sigh of relief.

He stood by the air pipe watching Togo and Gershon work the lance and muck hose, hoping LN would appear. He crouched down and started back through the tunnel. In the basement, he crept up the stairs and put his ear to the door. The voices weren't clear. Occasionally, he caught a word but he couldn't follow the conversation. Still, he was satisfied LN was in control.

Back in the tunnel, he took over the lance from Togo.

Carol Rowan tipped her cup upward and captured the last few drops of her tea. She knew her husband was waiting for her report. She set the cup down in its saucer. "I've got to run along," she said.

LN rose immediately. "I'm glad you came," she said with pretended innocence. "Do stop by again." She walked the neighbor to the door, where they stopped for a moment.

"Bye now," Carol said. "Thank you for the tea."

"You're quite welcome. Goodnight." LN closed the door and let out a deep sigh of relief. A few seconds later she snapped out the post light and hurried down into the basement.

"Well, how are things at the Trimble's?" Bob Rowan asked.

"Normal. We had tea and talked."

"Was she alone?"

"Yes. She's such a sweet person to take care of that house for the Trimble's. I don't think they would've gone if she hadn't volunteered to live-in."

"Did she hear the car last night?"

"No. And neither did I. You just imagined it."

"Just the same, I'm glad you went over."

"Well, I hope you sleep better tonight."

LN put her wig on the bottom step and pulled off her dress. She slipped into a pair of old bluejeans and a tee-shirt and pulled on a pair of old low cut tennis shoes.

She turned the fan on high as she passed. At the other end, the men felt the rush of fresh air.

"It's LN at last," Southgate said. Turning, he saw the beam of her flashlight back in the tunnel.

Her heart quickened as she moved forward. "Whew," she said when she reached the work area. "I was really worried."

"So were we," Southgate replied. He handed the lance to Togo. "Who was it?"

"Carol Rowan. She lives next door. Her husband was worried. Seems he heard the van leave last night."

"We've got to be more careful," Southgate said soberly. A note of anxiety entered his voice as he continued. "From now on we walk in. When we need to haul supplies, we'll drop them and get the van out of here. Let's make a rule that no vehicle leaves here after ten-thirty. This neighborhood is just too quiet after that."

"I agree," Togo said.

After a short rest, the four of them worked together. In the early morning hours, when they left the tunnel, Togo stopped at the model and marked their progress. They'd gone another fifteen feet. They were one hundred and twenty eight feet out from the basement.

\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Twenty Nine

LN's heels clicked along Union avenue toward the Peabody hotel. Ahead, where the asphalt canyon broke into the open at the river's bank, she saw the lastlight of day, a pink dab just above the horizon. Behind her, to the east, dusk had fallen. She felt half undressed and realized she was minus her wig. These days, she seemed to wear it as often as not.

Tonight, she was herself. Riding up in the elevator she hoped the men were safely inside the Trimble's house. Southgate had the key so LN could meet Margaret Jean. After the unexpected call by Carol Rowan the night before, a few hours in the relaxed atmosphere of the Skyway was welcome palliation.

"Hello," LN sang out.

Margaret Jean waved and walked towards her.

"Ah, ladies, you wish a table?" the maitre d' asked with a flourish.

"Please," LN replied. She turned to her companion. "I had hoped Alan might be along."

Margaret Jean laughed. "He's avoiding you. The library you know."

The room wasn't crowded. Once seated, LN glanced around.

"Oh, my God," she exclaimed half under her breath.

"What is it?" asked Margaret Jean.

LN's face flushed. She remained quiet for a moment, slowly regaining her composure. "Why, nothing," she said. "I thought I'd seen someone I knew but I was wrong. I see a resemblance, but definitely, it's not her. That's not the person."

But it was and LN's heart continued to thump. A few tables away sat the Trimble's neighbors, the Clines and Warrens. Carol Rowan last night, now the others, LN thought. She wondered how different she looked in her natural ash blonde hair.

She'd seen Amy Cline first. For a few seconds they stared at each other. Amy had turned away, then almost instantly had taken a second look. Just coincidence, LN thought, she can't possibly recognize me. And she felt relieved when Amy didn't pursue the eye encounter.

The waiter came. Both women ordered whiskey sours. "For a change of pace," LN commented.

"Would you ladies like some hor d'oeuvres," the waiter asked. "We have some left. The cocktail hour wasn't busy tonight."

"They would be nice," Margaret Jean told him.

The Clines and Warrens rose from their table. They filed by LN as they walked out. Only Amy Cline looked closely at her. LN smiled, ice in her stomach. Amy returned the smile but gave no sign of recognition. Calm down, LN told herself, she's gone. But her heart continued to beat strongly.

Finally, the tension waned.

Of all the people in Memphis, I had to see them, LN thought. She wondered about the odds. Then, she thought of something nice. If the Clines and the Warrens were here, they couldn't see the men enter the Trimbles. LN sighed.

The waiter brought the hor d'oeuvres, then their drinks. Margaret Jean broke the silence. "For a while, I thought you'd seen a ghost."

"Wasn't that silly of me," LN said, laughing.

Both women sipped their drinks. Margaret Jean ate a fried shrimp, followed by a raw oyster.

"Hmmm. Good," she said. "Alan introduced me to oysters."

"Really. When?"

Margaret Jean blushed. "A few years ago. We were in New Orleans on a business trip."

"I didn't know you traveled with him."

"Sometimes. He's always scouring around for Elvis finds. He thinks he's more successful when he entertains at dinners. He likes me to be along as his partner." She laughed, then confided. "He has some things he shouldn't. Elvis' Medical records. Originals of contracts."

"How interesting."

"Isn't it? And all tucked away in that damned office safe."

"You sound peeved."



"He guards it with his life. You'd think as close as I am to him, he'd trust me. But I don't even know the combination." She laughed. "Sometimes I think the numbers are on his foreskin. She leaned forward. He has a tattoo on it. Isn't that wild?"

LN's eyes widened. "You're kidding."

"Absolutely not."

"Come on."

"No. It's true."

LN finished her drink. Out of nowhere the waiter appeared. "Another round, ladies?"

"Yes, please," LN said. She looked at Margart Jean, fascinated. "Well, I've certainly lived a sheltered life," she said.

Margaret Jean blushed again. "I shouldn't have told you," she said.

"His secret is safe with me," LN replied. She giggled. "Who can I tell?"

This night is full of surprises, LN thought. First the neighbors. Now this strange story about Axelbank. She looked at Margaret Jean and smiled. "You must find Alan very interesting."

"I do. But as I told you that day when I visited Delta, at times he infuriates me. There's no reason for him not to be here tonight. I asked him to come, just as a favor to me. But he wouldn't."

LN said, "I think that is my fault."

They chatted for a time with their second drinks. LN looked at her watch. "It's after ten o'clock," she said. "I should be going." After a pause, she added, "I must say, Margaret Jean, this has been a most interesting conversation."

Margaret Jean's eyes twinkled. "So much for his damned tattoo," she said.

LN arrived at the Trimbles a few minutes before eleven o'clock. The house was dark as she pulled her red Triumph into the driveway. She noticed the basement windows especially. There wasn't a stray ray of light anywhere around their edges.

After changing clothes, she went down into the tunnel. The operation was going smoothly. She helped for the next two hours. That night, when Togo marked the model, they had dug out one hundred and forty four feet.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Thirty

The next night, Thursday, Southgate, for the first time, brought equipment with him which sent and received ultra-sonic signals that, like a dog whistle, couldn't be heard by the human ear.

He took a transducer attached to an amplifier run on small batteries into the tunnel. Gershon went with him. Togo slipped into the backyard with a sensor tipped cane attached by wire to an ear piece similar to a hearing aid.

"Come with me," he called, motioning to LN.

They walked over the grass in the darkness to the white wooden fence which bordered Graceland behind the Trimble's house. Below, at the head of the tunnel, Southgate pressed the transducer against the dirt roof. A soft, intermittent tone sounded in Togo's ear. It became stronger.

"My gosh, we've already broken into Elvis' estate," he said, surprised. His voice was low.

He pulled himself up, peered across the fence, listened, then scrambled over. On the other side, he stood for several minutes with his back pressed against the slats. Not a muscle moved. Ahead of him, no more than twenty-five feet away, a pale light shown through the stained glass windows in the curving wall on the southside of the gravesite.

Stealthily, he tiptoed three steps forward. The tone faded. He turned and clambered back over the fence. He held the cane against the barrier and tapped it lightly on the ground. Again, the sound was louder. He was sure now that the tunnel extended a foot or so into Graceland.

He pulled a compass from his pocket and took a reading on the third stained glass window. The line was straight and true. They were right on target.

He walked over to LN, who stood a few feet away. "Let's go back inside," he whispered. They retraced their steps.

Southgate and Gershon waited at the tunnel entrance. Both had expectant looks. Southgate broke the silence. "Give us the news," he said. "How far are we actually?"

"We've crossed into Graceland," Togo replied, a sound of jubilation in his voice. "We're about a foot beyond the fence and true to the line. I took a compass reading."

"Hooray," Gershon and Southgate shouted in unison.

"I was over the fence," Togo said. "I could almost touch the curved wall with the cane."

"Any trouble?" Southgate inquired cautiously.

"None."

"How was the signal?" Southgate asked.

"Adequate."

"We would have never gotten a radio signal through five feet of earth, that's for sure,"

Togo rested the cane against the wall. "I'm anxious to begin digging," he said. "It's really exciting up there where I can see how little distance we have left."

"Check," Southgate said.

A few minutes later the four of them were deep inside the tunnel. LN ran the lance from the now familiar camp stool while Southgate cleared away the muck and Togo and Gershon kept pace with the shoring.

"Now I know how Columbus felt when he sighted land," Togo told Gershon. "God, what a thrill to stand on the Graceland side of the fence and know that underneath we were in the new world."

"New world is right," Gershon said. "The closer we get to that vault the spookier I feel."

"Come on Gershon, look on the bright side. Not many people get to rattle around in a grave and live to tell it."

"That's what I keep telling myself," Gershon said in a resigned tone of voice. He lifted a piece of plywood and held it aloft against the roof. Togo slipped in the supports.

"Just like clockwork," he said.

After a time, Southgate and LN switched places. Still later, Gershon ran the lance for an hour, then Togo. At one o'clock in the morning, Southgate called a halt.

"Are you game to make another trip across the fence into no man's land," Southgate asked Togo.

"I'm willing," he replied. "This might be the perfect time." He looked at LN. "Come as far as the fence with me again."

Outside the house, they waited for their eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. It was a different blackness than the tunnel. The night was clear and stars filled the milky way. The murkiness below ground was of another kind, turbid and watery. Air was at a premium down under. Death lingered there. Above ground, Togo had only a feeling of danger.

"Let's go," he said, taking LN's hand. He felt her tremble slightly.

The estate was dark now. There was no stained glass window to sight on. Togo's eyes swept the landscape, then he listened. "Okah, I'm going over," he whispered. LN watched him disappear. Cautiously, he lowered himself on the other side. There he looked and listened again. Then, with the cane in front of him, he walked slowly forward.

He stopped frequently, aware at all times of the distance back to the fence. It was his only escape route. At first, the tone in his earphone was a monotonous low buzz. He thrust the cane outward like a divining rod. Only when he approached the curved wall did the tone become loud.

He was too excited to stop. He pressed against the stone. Louder. He was sure the end of the tunnel had reached the wall.

A new boldness surged through him. He looked to either side, then slid along to the west end of the wall. He peeked around. His heart jumped into his throat. There fifty feet away, he saw the guard house. A light burned inside. On the far side, he saw a television screen.

My God, he thought, its part of the electronic security system.

Slowly, he retreated. He looked constantly now for hidden cameras. Still, he was determined to test beyond the wall. He worked his way silently to the other end. After a few moments, he inched his way along. It seemed like eternity before he reached the third stained glass window. He knelt below it to avoid any chance of being silhouetted. He probed with his cane. The tone was loudest at the base of the wall. He crawled forward. the tone faded.

Togo stared at the gravestone eighteen feet away. An eerie feeling of fear crept through him. He felt exposed and vulnerable away from the wall. Simultaneously, he was mesmerized by the majesty of the site. There was a tug of war inside of him between calmness and panic. Across the middle distance he saw the guardhouse again. It looked less ominous now.

Togo took a deep breath. He turned around and crept back to the wall. The security of the stone felt good against his back. He rested for a full minute, renewing his knowledge of the layout. Finally, he slithered along the wall and around the corner.

He cut straight across the lawn from there and scrambled back over the fence several yards away from the point where he'd gone over. LN heard him.

"What took so long?" she gasped when he was beside her.

"A deep probe," he said. He took her gently by the arm and began walking. "Let's get inside."

Southgate and Gershon were still in the tunnel. LN sat down on the basement stairs. Togowent over and turned off the fan, the signal to his partners that he'd returned. Shortly, the two men exited.

They all sat on the steps now, Togo beside LN and Southgate and Gershon below them. Gershon leaned back against the wall of the stairwell. Their subdued voices matched the quietness throughout the rest of the house.

"The face of the tunnel is right under the stained glass window," Togo told them. "We're no more than eighteen feet from the grave. It was right in front of me. I could have reached out and touched it."

"You were gone a long time," Southgate said. "Any problems?"

"I reconnoitered both sides of the curved wall. That's what took so much time. I wanted to be sure where we were. I thought at first we might be slightly beyond the wall." For a moment he paused. "I had to be careful. The guardhouse by the grave is used to monitor the security system."

"You were that close?"



Togo nodded and explained his scouting venture in detail. When he'd finished, Southgate said, "I don't see the need for anymore night patrols. If we need to check further one of us can go in as a tourist." He turned to Togo. "That was a job well done, old buddy."

Togo smiled. LN gave him a hug.

On the model, Togo marked their progress at one hundred and fifty nine feet.

The next afternoon, when LN called in to the mail drops, the frequency hoppers had arrived. She telephoned Southgate at his office in Old Main.

"Let's pick them up," he said.

An hour later, they were on their way downtown in Southgate's car. LN wore a gray wig and granny glasses. Her dress was several inches below the knees and plain black oxfords covered her feet. A black cane lay beside her. The costumes was courtesy of the Delta drama department.

"You're right out of Arsenic and Old Lace," Southgate commented with a laugh.

"And just as sweet," LN kidded.

They drove on in silence for a time. Traffic was light. and they made good speed. The downtown skyline was soon visible in front of them.

"Let's cross the river first and work back," Southgate said.

LN nodded her approval.

Millie's Answering Service in West Memphis was up over a hardware store. LN climbed the narrow flight of stairs easily, then leaned on her cane as she opened the door. The room was unpretentious. Dark red Formica covered a counter which stretched between the walls. Behind the counter several women worked the telephones. A young, neatly dressed woman came forward.

"Hello. I'm here to pick up a package for Razorback Electronics, Inc.," LN said.

"Just one minute." The woman disappeared through a door and returned carrying a package wrapped in brown paper. "Are you Mrs. Nelson?"

"Yes I am."

"You sounded so young over the phone."

"In spirit, deary, I am."

The woman laughed. "Well, here's your package. Can you manage all right?"

"Oh, yes. I have a car waiting." LN half smiled. "Are you Millie?"

The woman laughed again. "There's no Millie. That's just a name. Does it sound friendly?"

"Yes it does," LN said. She turned away from the counter.

"Good-bye," the woman said.

LN climbed into Southgate's car and put the box on the back seat. "Two to go," she said. "Communications Unlimited is next. It's in the Bondi building on Jefferson street."

They drove back across the Mississippi river bridge into Memphis.

"Everything go smoothly?" Southgate asked.

"No problems."

Communications Unlimited was as different from Millie's as night and day. It had a tenth floor waiting room of modernistic chrome and plastic policed by a bleached blonde receptionist. Everything else was out of sight.

"I'm from the East Memphis Radio club," LN began. "We've had a package dropped here."

The blonde pressed a button on her intercom. "Yes," a young, male voice said. "Pick-up for the East Memphis Radio Club." The receptionist smiled. "Won't you sit down?"

In the chair, LN started to cross her legs but stopped. She sat leaning forward on her cane instead. She stood when a teen-aged boy entered with her package.

"Let me open the door for you, ma'am," he said.

LN smiled inwardly. I've forgotten the perfect touch, she thought to herself. A shawl. "Thank you, young man."

The Elite Answering Service was out Jackson avenue on the second floor of a professional building filled with physicians and dentists, many of whom no doubt were clients. LN was in and out again in five minutes with her package addressed to the Bates Electric company.

Southgate turned east into Jackson and they headed for home.

"Wigs are hot," LN said, pulling hers off. She took a comb from her purse and ran it through her real hair.

"I like you better as a blonde," Southgate said.

"It's easier, that's for sure."

They stopped in front of Southgate's townhouse. "I'd like to test the hoppers," he said. "Come in while I unwrap these."

They carried the three boxes inside. Ten minutes later LN took half of the six frequency hoppers to her own townhouse two doors away.

All of the units looked alike in their black, metal cases. Each one weighed seven pounds and was about the same size as a CB car radio. They had transistors and operated on rechargeable gel cell batteries. They were extremely sophisticated. Each one had sixteen channels and these frequencies rotated in sequence every one-tenth of a second. It was difficult, if not impossible, to trace transmissions because of the channel hopping. All of the sets were synchronized to change channels at the same instant.

Southgate's hoppers had a range equal to one mile per one foot of elevation. In other words, on line of sight distance, he could transmit ten miles with a ten foot antenna.

LN set hers on the kitchen counter and switched one on.

"Hi there, neighbor." It was Southgate's voice strong and clear.

"Brax, you sound beautiful."

"It's my best classroom manner."

"Let me try another one." She said. She turned the first one off and flicked the switch on a second one. "Can you hear me?"

"Like a symphony."

"I'm going to test the third one."

"Go ahead."

LN again changed units. "This is number three. How does it sound?"

"Just like the others. Clear as the Old Main bell."

"Did you change units, too?"

"Everytime you did."

"They all work?"

"Every one."

"Brax, I think I like these better than my telephone."

"Nice, eh?"

"Shall I bring mine back over to you?"

"There's no need for them all to be together. Keep those three in your house."

"Delighted." LN looked at her watch. "Want a sandwich before I go out to the Trimble's?"

"Togo and I have to nail together the last of the tunnel supports."

"See you tonight then."

"Check."

\*\*\*\* \* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Thirty One

The crew was elated at the arrival of the frequency hoppers and that night gathered at the tunnel entrance eager to begin digging the home stretch, as Southgate called the last eighteen feet. The scene was reminiscent of a locker room before the big game. The four conspirators huddled together, tense with excitement.

"We'll cut out ten feet more of passageway," Southgate said. The others nodded. "Then, we'll widen it into a chamber for the final eight feet."

"How wide is the chamber going to be?" Gershon asked.

All eyes were on Southgate. "Ten feet. That's three additional feet on each side of the passage. That should give us plenty of room to maneuver in front of the vault."

The explanation was sufficient. The longer supporting beams were already piled nearby. He didn't say it, but a look of "let's go get'em" covered Southgate's face.

He turned on his flashlight and crawled into the tunnel. The others followed single file past the whirling exhaust fan. Talk was at a minimum. Somehow, the tunnel didn't invite idle conversation, even on this Friday night of expected success.

At the tunnel face, Southgate turned and leaned against the dirt. The cold surface penetrated his back. "LN, you operate the lance."

The pump engines begin to whine. LN unfolded the camp stool and sat down. Togo held the muck sucker at ready. Southgate slid between them and joined Gershon several feet to the rear.

"Let her go," he shouted.

The water spurted forward out of the lance and dug into the loess. Small chunks began to fall away. LN's eyes darted back and forth following the action. Togo started the clean-up. Southgate and Gershon watched for several minutes, then began to move the shoring into place.

Already Southgate's mouth was sticky dry. He spit at the wall. Nothing. Gershon shoved a frame forward. "When do you think we'll finish," he asked.

"If we don't run into trouble, well, then maybe as early as tomorrow afternoon."

"I've been thinking about the tow truck."

Southgate sighed. "We might be ready for it sometime Sunday. I don't know yet."

"Sunday would be a good day. The garage is closed. The wrecker would be all ours."

"All I can say is we'll try."

Both men fell silent as their muscles bent to the task. Everyone knew their place. There was no need to shout orders. LN had learned to handle the lance expertly and she flogged the dirt like a slavemaster cracking a bull whip. The earth offered no resistance. Muck splattered her face. She became only more defiant.

Togo slipped in the mud. But he didn't seem to mind. The excitement and anticipation of early evening had not yet passed. Only later would the aching muscles signal his fatigue as they had done on all previous nights.

"Togo, do you think there's any more rock?" LN asked. She had drilled steadily for an hour. Three feet, perhaps a little more, had been hewed away.

"I don't think so. Just pray there isn't. It would be nice and cozy to have a chamber of rock but it would be a bitch to carve out."

Togo took the back of his hand and wiped a band of sweat from his forehead. LN adjusted her body on the camp stool. Her lungs ached for fresh air. She turned her head slightly in hopes of catching a wave of oxygen from the ventilator. After a deep gasp, she faced the dirt barrier again.

Another hour passed. She stretched her legs to avoid cramps.

"Togo would you like to trade off?" she asked.



"Would I ever." He pulled the end of the muck hose out of the water and waited for her to hand him the lance. After she was off of the stool he gave her the vacuum. He sat down immediately. LN stretched her arms. When she was ready, Togo let the pressured stream of water loose again.

The dirt shattered into hundreds of little pieces and fell to the floor. LN bent over and scooped up the slush. They talked little, intent only on the challenge to finish the passageway. It's like a fever, LN thought. She no longer minded the discomfort and this pleased her. Still, she knew she could never live underground forever. Dirt had no beauty, it offered no inspiration. When surrounded by it, the spirit lost its luster. One star in the heavens could create a thousand dreams. An earthen chamber chilled the senses.

Southgate tapped Togo on the shoulder. "We've been at it for three hours. Let's take a measurement." Togo stopped the lance. Southgate pressed the end of the metal tape measure into the dirt face. "Hold this here," he told Togo. The tape unrolled as Southgate slouched backwards through the tunnel. When he passed over the line where the night's work had begun, he stopped and locked the tape in place.

"Nine and a half feet," he called out. He unlocked the tape and motioned Togo forward. Southgate reeled in the metal. "That's it," he said when he and Togo stood face to face. "Let's start the chamber."

A smile broke through the mud on Togo's face.

"Let's go three feet straight ahead and then cut out a three foot section on each side of it," Southgate said. "Does that sound okay to you?"

"It does. We'll repeat that pattern two more times and we'll be done."

Gershon and LN, who were standing beside Togo, nodded.

"How much longer do you all want to work?" Southgate asked.

His three companions looked at each other. "It makes no difference to me," Gershon said. LN agreed. "Let's make a stab at three more hours then, Brax," Togo spoke out.

"Sounds good to me," Southgate replied. "We'll try to get the first section of the chamber done."

The dirt continued to be pliable under the water pressure of the lance. As soon as the three feet straight ahead was done, they shored up the roof with temporary supports. Next, they cut away three feet to the east and fitted it with more temporary shoring. They repeated the operation on the west side.

Southgate sat down on the stool. "That is some night's work," he said as he looked around.

"We ought to finish tomorrow, Brax," Togo said.

Gershon leaned against a wall, his eyes half closed. Southgate got up and turned off the pumps. Gershon lurched outward startled. LN waved her hand in front of his face and laughed.

"I almost fell asleep," he said, embarrassed.

"You and LN start out," Southgate said. "I want to make a final check of the shoring. Togo you stay with me."

Southgate pushed his hand against the plywood every six inches or so. Togo did the same thing in the opposite direction. LN and Gershon disappeared into the tunnel.

"I wouldn't want a cave-in after we've come all this way," Southgate said.

Togo continued testing. "I'd hate to be trapped this far in," he said.

After several minutes, Southgate turned to Togo. "I'm satisfied. Are you?" Togo nodded.

Work resumed on the chamber at six o'clock the next morning after five hours sleep. Despite the bleary eyes everyone was eager. Togo ran the lance and Gershon the mud hose. LN went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast. Southgate ate first and then relieved Gershon. Twenty minutes later Gershon reappeared and took the lance from Togo.

Togo and LN ate together.

"This'll be a big day for us," Togo told her. "I'm sure if we finish the chamber by mid-afternoon Brax will have Gershon pick up the tow truck. Tomorrow we'll get Carrie."

"It's sad about Carrie," LN sighed, pouring them another coffee of coffee.

"Gleamer played right into our hands though," Togo pointed out.

"I know we have to look at it that way."

"You can't blame Gleamer for remarrying."

"No, I can't. It'll be good for him."

"You can't blame Boots, I guess that's what they call her, either."

LN spread strawberry jam on an English muffin. "Do you ever think about marrying again, Togo?"

After a long pause he replied, "sometimes."

"Anyone in particular?"

"When the time comes, I'll know." He winked and grinned at LN across the table. Both were silent for a time. Togo swallowed the last of his coffee. "I'd better get back."

"I'll be down as soon as I clear up the dishes.." Almost as as afterthought she added, "now doesn't that sound domestic."

"Check," Togo agreed.

Ahead, Togo saw the shadows of his two companions in the glare of the floodlight. The pump engines vibrated quietly. Togo tapped Southgate on the shoulder.

"LN will be here shortly," he explained. "She's straightening up the kitchen."

Southgate nodded and returned to his vacuuming. Water stood on the floor now as Gershon cut away the dirt. Bless the loess, Togo thought to himself. LN appeared beside him and waited for Southgate to see her as he sloshed around in the mud. Finally, she called out, "Brax, I can take over from Gershon if you want me to."

Southgate stepped out of the doghouse. "Okah, you run the lance. Togo, you operate the hose. Gershon and I'll bring the bigger beams to the outside of the chamber. I don't think we can manuever them into place yet, but we can be prepared."

LN stepped forward and tapped Gershon on the shoulder to break his concentration. He flinched, then laughed when he turned and saw her.

"Ready?" he asked.

"All set."

Almost simultaneously Gershon slipped off the stool and she slid on. Togo moved up beside her with the hose. He leaned sideways and cupped her ear with his free hand.

"Still vote for domesticity?" he asked.

She laughed and turned on the lance. The dirt fell away. They moved three feet ahead the first hour and then widened the sides. After that, digging was stopped. The chamber was large enough to move in the ten foot beams and all four of the conspirators switched to the shoring. The roof was secure now over the two-thirds of the chamber hollowed out.

"Anyone want lunch?" LN asked.

The men exchanged glances. "I'm for going on," Gershon said.

"So am I," Togo put in.

Southgate nodded. "How about you, LN?"

"I can wait." She picked up the lance and settled back down on the stool.

"Hold it a minute," Southgate called out. He walked back to the tunnel entrance and took out his compass. "Let's take one, last reading. We want to zero in on the vault if possible."

LN turned to watch. Southgate took his sighting. "Move about a foot to your right," he called to her. He looked at the compass face again. "Okah, give it a try. Two feet on each side and let's hope it's down the middle."

There was now less than three feet to go. The men pulled the pumps into the chamber. Southgate took over the muck hose. A mood of anticipation prevailed. All eyes followed intently the stream of pressurized water. No one spoke. More dirt washed away as the minutes passed.

LN stared straight ahead. She moved the lance upward and watched the stream of water bore into the loess. The next instant a small gray area of concrete was exposed.

"Wahoo," she exclaimed. "There it is."

Water cascaded to the floor as she played the hose over a widening surface. The men gathered behind her, solemn in their moment of triumph.

When the outline of the vault was clear, LN shifted her stool sideways and knifelike began to cut into the dirt beside her. The earth fell away several inches at a time. She'd cleared about two feet when a second vault was revealed. LN glanced at Southgate with a puzzled look on her face.

"Keep going," he told her. "There's no point in checking for the correct vault now. Let's finish the chamber first."

LN cut away another foot to complete the corner. A third vault was partially exposed as she squared off the chamber on the other side. As quickly as possible, the men put up the shoring.

Gershon left the house to make arrangements with Olson's garage to pick up the tow truck later that afternoon. LN went up to her bedroom, where she showered, changed clothes and put on her wig before returning to the basement.

"Your ultra-sonic equipment is in here," Southgate, pointing to a canvas tote bag. "When you get to the grave site place it as closely as possible to Elvis' marker. We'll be underneath with the cane to indentify his vault."

"I should be there and ready in ten to fifteen minutes," LN said. "I'll just walk over. With the tote bag it'll look like I'm going to the shopping center."

"Fine," Southgate said.

LN hesitated. "I've a camera upstairs. I'll put that and a sweater over the equipment."

"There should be some cover," Southgate agreed.

LN hurried upstairs. Several minutes later she left the house and walked to U.S. highway 51. The sun felt pleasantly warm after the dankness of the tunnel. As usual, there was a small crowd at the music gate when she arrived. She joined the tourists entering the estate and casually made her way to the gravesite.

The four graves spread out in the foreground surrounded by the low, wrought iron fence. LN set the bag down directly in front of Elvis' granite marker, picked up the camera and took several photographs of its bronze plaque. Other tourists milled about talking softly and clicking their own cameras.

Underground, Southgate moved the tip of the cane back and forth across the roof like a wand. The cord from the hearing device in his right ear looped over his shoulder and up the side of the cane. Togo stood beside him.

"The signal is loudest right here," he said pointing to a spot about two feet in front of the middle vault. "The bag is right next to the fence."



"We're right on target," Togo said.

Southgate took the earphone off. "I suppose we should move all of our equipment back into the basement."

Togo scratched his head. "It has to be done sometime. We can't move Carrie in until the passage is clear. Let's drag out the pumps first."

Southgate shook his head. "We should never have let Gershon leave."

Togo just laughed. "Two of us equal one of him."

Above the chamber, LN bent over and gently replaced her camera in the tote bag. She lingered for several minutes, bag in hand, then made her way back down the drive to the music gate.

By dinner time the passage was clear. Gershon returned with the keys to Olson's tow truck in his pocket and told the others that it was all gassed up and ready for tomorrow morning.

Later that night, they were back in the chamber ready to cut into the vault with a high powered electric saw.

"Give it a whirl," Southgate said.

Togo pressed the button. The sound reverberated through the chamber, many times louder than the water pumps. Gershon and LN covered their ears.

"Turn it off. Turn it off," Southgate shouted, his voice barely audible.

Togo hit the button again and the motor spun to a halt.

"My God," Southgate gasped, appalled. "It never occurred to me it would be that noisy." A sorrowful expression crossed his face. "We sure can't use that. It's empty above us now but if there were tourists up there they'd damn well hear that saw. And at night there are the guards around the estate."

"Agreed," Togo lamented. "It's too chancey."

Gershon shook his head. "What'll we do now?"

"What I should have thought of in the beginning," Togo said reassuringly. "A laser."

Gershon's eyes widened. "Jesus, yes! Noiseless and the cut is practically invisible."

Southgate was all smiles again. "For a minute I thought it was all over."

"We can get a laser from the physics lab at school," Togo said.

"That delays us at least a day but there's no other alternative,"

Southgate replied. "We'll go ahead and get Carrie tomorrow. We'll get the laser on Monday and open the vault Monday night."

"Check," LN said and giggled.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Thirty Two

Sunday morning arrived clear and bright.

"Some contrast to the tunnel," Southgate said as he and Togo pulled up to Carrie's grave in the van. Gershon drove the tow truck behind them.

Gleamer's farm was off on a side road some distance from the main highway. It was quiet there in the country air and sunshine. Southgate opened the back doors and handed Togo a spade, then placed two more against the bumper.

Gershon climbed down from the cab of his wrecker and donned a pair of fleece lined, jersey work gloves. He grabbed one of the spades and walked to the grave. Southgate closed the doors and picked up the last spade. Beside the grave he leaned it against his leg and put on his own pair of work gloves.

"Let's each take a third," he said.

Togo slipped on his gloves. "I'll take the middle," he said and dipped the tip of his spade into the ground. He pushed his foot down on the edge.

"Let's pile the sod over there," Southgate said. He pointed to a spot a few feet off to the side.

"Why not cut it in strips?" suggested Gershon.

"Good enough," Southgate said. "Make them about a foot wide. When we're through, we'll roll them back in place."

They sliced the grassy lengths with the tips of their spades, cut underneath and coiled them up. Then they removed about a foot and a half of soil from the top of the concrete vault.

"Maybe it's for the best that our saw was too noisy last night, "Togo said. "We'll get a chance to study this one first. Might save us a costly mistake."

"That's right," Southgate replied.

When the top of the vault was clear, Gershon backed the tow truck up until the hook hung over the grave. The top slab of the vault was pried up at one end. Togo looped straps underneath. Gershon clamored back into the tow truck and lowered the hook. Togo fastened the straps.

"O.K.," lift away," Southgate shouted.

Slowly, like the contents in a cargo net on a river dock, the slab rose. Southgate and Togo each grabbed an end. Gershon inched the big truck forward and slightly to the right.

"Steady as she goes," Togo shouted.

When the slab was clear of the grave by twenty feet, Gershon stopped and lowered the hook until the concrete cover lay on the ground again. Togo unhitched the hook. "Take her away," he shouted and motioned Gershon ahead with his hands.

The truck jumped ahead several yards. Gershon twisted the steering wheel and put the gears in reverse. Slowly, he backed up to the grave again and lowered the hook.

This time, the heavy straps were slipped under Carrie's casket, and attached to the hook. Gears groaned and the hook started to lift the coffin out the ground. When it reached the surface, Togo and Southgate seized the ends. The casket swayed slightly.

"Easy does it," Togo shouted.

Southgate held his end steady. The swinging stopped. The casket was three feet above the ground. The truck crept away and made a wide, slow turn until it passed the back of the van.

Southgate motioned Gershon to stop. Togo swung the doors open to reveal a second casket of dirty gray wood. A dark mold covered large sections. The two men quickly slid it out and placed it on the ground. Gershon watched from the cab of the tow truck.

Southgate motioned to him. "Back up just a little now."

Gershon eased the truck into place even with the back doors of the van. Southgate and Togo maneuvered one end of the casket onto the floor. Gershon hopped out of the truck and joined them. All three eased the casket inside and Togo closed the doors.

"That couldn't have gone better," Southgate said. He turned to Gershon. "The tow truck made it easy."

"It sure did," Togo put in.

They walked over to the other casket.

"You did a beautiful job duplicating mold," Southgate said to Gershon. "It looks like the real McCoy."

"A little bit of this and a little bit of that," Gershon grinned. "I hope it fools them." He pointed toward Carrie's former grave. "I want to take a good look at the inside of that vault before we leave. They all must look the same. Elvis' must be just like it inside. I want to make the mix for his tonight."

Togo and Gershon walked over and peered into the vault. After a short pause, they jumped inside for a closer inspection. Dark mildew stains spotted the walls. The floor was discolored by damp patches. Here and there, they found hairline cracks with minute seepage.

"It's held up well," Togo said.

"Thank God, or we'd never get away with that wooden coffin," replied Gershon. He looked Togo in the eye. "What's Brax going to do if the undertaker is suspicious?"

"Don't worry. Brax has negotiated with some fellow whose barely making it. He's not going to question a thing."

"I hope not."

"It's as risk proof as possible. We can't ask for more."

Togo boosted himself from the vault, followed by Gershon. Along with Southgate they carried the lighter wooden casket to the grave and carefully lowered it.

"What's the weight inside?" asked Gershon.

"Animal bones. Enough to equal the weight of a human skeleton," Southgate replied.

"I had to give it authenticity. They give us ballast now and ashes later."

A large plastic sheet was placed over the gravesite.

"That'll protect things until I meet the undertaker here tomorrow morning," Southgate said. "I told him I'd already have the grave open."

"He didn't think that was odd?" Gershon asked.

"He was very appreciative," said Southgate.

Gershon shrugged. "Don't call him to come for me."

"He couldn't even lift you," Southgate deadpanned.

Gershon chuckled and walked to the tow truck. "I'll see you tonight."

He climbed into the cab and drove away.

Togo and Southgate got into the van. They drove to the Trimble's with Carrie in the back.

Gershon walked to the Trimble's from Graceland shopping center, where he'd parked Southgate's convertible. Darkness had just fallen. The garage doors were closed and the van had been backed in behind them.

He joined Togo, Southgate and LN in the garage, where a hospital cart was level with the van's floor. With his help, Carrie's casket was pulled onto the cart and wheeled out the back door of the garage. Earlier, Togo and Southgate had put planks over the steps down into the back door of the basement. Now, the four conspirators guided the cart cautiously down the ramp. Gershon was in front, his back pressed against the casket as it shifted slightly forward.

"Careful now," Southgate said. "Ease it down."

The front wheels reached the basement floor. Togo and Southgate inched the cart forward until it was safely inside. At the tunnel entrance the casket was transferred to the sled which once held the lance pump. A five-sixteenth steel cable was already hooked to the sled. Far down the tunnel a winch was anchored to two, four foot long metal pipes driven deep into the ground.

"Turn on the power," Southgate said.

Togo disappeared into the darkened passageway, where the winch motor was attached to a car battery. He flicked the switch and the steel cable began to wind slowly around a steel drum. The sled gave a slight jerk and began to slide laboriously into the tunnel. Gershon and Southgate guided it encouragingly. The cable groaned. The sled rumbled down the incline inside the entrance and then moved along the straight away.



Progress was steady but unspectacular. About half way down the tunnel it reached the pipes, which were then removed and replanted against the vault deep inside the chamber. The winch was attached and the steel cable was hooked onto the sled again. Togo kicked on the power and once more the sled with the casket eased forward.

A flashlight beam played along the damp tunnel walls as LN lighted the way ahead for Gershon and Southgate.

"A little left now," Southgate called out.

Gershon adjusted the sled accordingly and they moved on yard by yard until the sled was safely within the chamber. There it was tucked away to the right of Elvis' vault.

"Less trouble than I thought," Southgate said, gratified.

"But still a fair night's work," Togo added.

Shortly after nine o'clock Monday morning, Southgate watched a black hearse roll along the road towards Carrie's grave. He waved as it approached. The vehicle stopped near the grave and a lean, bony man with a patrician nose stepped out of the passenger side into the sunshine. "Good morning, Mr. Southgate."

"Hello, Mr. Foley."

"Nice day isn't it."

Southgate nodded. Mr. Foley motioned to the driver and directed him to back the hearse up near the grave. He turned back again to Southgate. "The other boys are right behind us." He looked down the gravel road, where a swirl of dust rose off in the distance. "There they are now."

Southgate saw a black panel truck approach. When it was close enough, he could see three men squeezed in the front seat.

"The boys will close the grave after we're gone, Mr. Southgate, if you want them to. No extra charge."

"That would save me coming back," Southgate said.

Mr. Foley glanced towards the freshly dug trench. "Let's get the plastic off boys," he shouted. He turned to Southgate again. "You've saved alot of time already by having it opened."

"There wasn't much dirt to move. Just that on top of the vault."

"You've taken care of the monument?"

"Yes. That'll be removed tomorrow. Then we'll seed the area."

"Mr. Westfall will be pleased."

"I hope he will."

The undertaker walked to the grave, which was open now. The plastic sheet had been folded in half and lay several feet away. The men already had the straps under the coffin.

"Bring it up carefully, boys," Mr. Foley directed.

Once above the ground, the casket was wrapped in the plastic and carried to the hearse.

"You follow us, Mr. Southgate. We're going directly to Hope cemetery."

"Okah, Mr. Foley."

The hearse pulled away followed by Southgate's convertible. In his rear view mirror, Southgate could see the men struggle with the top of the vault. The tow truck was easier, He thought. Mark one up for Gershon.

As the hearse neared Memphis the traffic increased and Southgate stayed close behind. Inside the cemetery, the tree lined drive wound around to the crematorium. Southgate pulled up behind the parked hearse. Mr. Foley came around the the driver's side of the convertible and leaned inside the window. "Come with me, Mr. Southgate, You'll have to witness this."

The two men walked inside the gray stone building in silence. In a few minutes the casket was carried in and placed on a metal conveyor. The attendant, a sallow skinned man with brown hair in tousled disorder, pushed a button and the belt began to move. The furnace doors opened automatically as the casket approached. The casket glided in among the orange and blue flames and disappeared as the doors closed.

Southgate shivered involuntarily. The undertaker turned to him. "What's to be done with the ashes?"

"Scattered over the farm. I'll pick them up when they're ready."

The two men walked from the building. Mr. Foley said, "I was surprised to see a wooden casket in a vault. But it worked out real fine."

\*\*\*\*\*

### Chapter Thirty Three

Togo entered the tunnel shortly after dark on Monday night carrying a black metal case about sixteen inches long and three inches square in one hand. This was the laser he'd borrowed earlier that day from the Delta college physics department.

He was accompanied by Southgate and Gershon. LN was in the back yard putting Elvie through his paces with the suede bag. Southgate was in the lead carrying a flashlight. He'd switched on the fan as he passed. The men walked along silently and slightly stooped over to avoid hitting the support beams.

They were inwardly excited but outwardly subdued. Of the three, only Togo had experience with a laser. He would direct this final step of their underground operation. When they reached the chamber, Southgate switched on the floodlight. The white glare bounced back at them off the vault.

Gershon shivered. "I feel as if I've just walked into the tomb of an ancient Egyptian king," he said. "I don't feel like I'm just a few feet under Memphis."

"Your own muscle helped get us here," Southgate replied.

"I know. But somehow, suddenly, it feels like so much more than just moving all that dirt."

"It's a new king in a new era," Southgate said.

Togo plugged in the laser as they talked. The same ten horsepower motor that earlier drove the hydraulic lance would energize the carbon dioxide enclosed in a skinny glass cartridge inside the case when he was ready.

He pulled a tape measure from his pocket and walked to the vault. "I need two of you to help me measure," he called out. Both Gershon and Southgate jumped to his side. Togo bent down and placed the end of the rule at the bottom of the vault and measured up four inches. He made a mark and repeated the ritual three feet to his right.

"You two hold the tape on those dots," he said, pulling a Magic Marker from his other pocket. Carefully, he drew a three foot line along the top of the metal rule. Then he measured up four feet from each end, made sure the lines were straight and with Southgate and Gershon again holding the rule taut, he drew two more lines on the vault. He completed the square with a line across the top.

All three men stepped back. Togo donned safety glasses and a surgical mask. He walked forward again until he was about ten inches from the vault, the laser in his hands. For a moment he stood in front of the line on the right side of the vault. Then, he switched on the laser and began to move it up the mark about an inch every two and a half seconds. The 5,000 watt beam, emitted from a tiny hole no bigger than a pencil dot, cut a line so fine it was almost invisible.

Seven times he went attentively up and down the line, slightly beveling the cut. As the beam vaporized the concrete, a fine dust spray rose along the wall. After the seventh incision, he clicked off the laser. "If I've figured correctly, we're through on that side," he said. As he lowered the laser his arms trembled from the tension.

"Could I do one?" Southgate asked.

"I think so," replied Togo. "I can't do them all and maintain the accuracy we want. The cutting is just too intense."

Southgate picked up the laser and walked to the left line.

"Don't forget the bevel," Togo reminded him. "It's going to make it that much harder to see the cut from the inside."

Southgate nodded. Togo sat down, his back against the dirt wall. He pumped his arms in and out to regain circulation. "That's a bitch," he said to Gershon. "But it's important that the line be precise."

"You did a nice job," Gershon said.

Ahead of them, Southgate tracked the beam along the black line through the safety glasses. The surgical mask protected him from the dust that swirled off of the concrete. Fifteen minutes later he finished the seventh sweep of the mark. As his concentration relaxed, he became aware of the strain in his arm muscles. He let the laser drop to his side as he clicked it off. For a moment, his arms tingled.

"Two down and two to go," Southgate said, turning to his companions. He held the laser out to Gershon. "You're next," he said.

Gershon took the safety glasses and surgical mask.

"Do the top line," Togo said.

Gershon began his cut from left to right. He moved smoothly along the line, his concentration deep. Southgate and Togo watched in silence as the beam moved back and forth. The chamber was quiet, the laser noiseless. Twelve minutes passed.

Gershon turned away from the vault. "That's my seventh time," he said, shutting down the laser. He rubbed a forearm. "It feels a little prickly."

Togo and Southgate approached the vault. "The bottom cut is a bit tricky," Togo said. "If we go all the way through, we'll burn a line across the end of the casket. We don't want to do that. I suggest we cut in for three and three-fourths inched and then stop with just a quarter of an inch still anchored."

"Will the break be clean?" Southgate asked.

"It should be," Togo told him.

"I leave it up to you," Southgate replied.

"All right. Let's each take the beam along the bottom line twice. You start, Brax."

Southgate turned on the laser and traced the beam over and back along the line. Gershon was next, then Togo. They stood back and stared at the vault. "Well, that's it," Southgate said. "The cutting is done." He turned and reached for the drill beside him on the floor, quickly made two holes part way into the face of the vault and put in bolts. He pulled on the bolts and the block tipped toward him.

Togo and Gershon each grabbed a side and delicately pulled downward until the cut section of concrete broke off at the bottom. They lifted it out and leaned it against the dirt wall. Togo jabbed the flashlight inside of the tomb. Directly ahead of him, almost touching his nose was one end of Elvis' casket.

Gershon and Southgate crowded in on each side of it. Togo flashed the light around. It was so still, they could hear one another breathe. Then, in one of the far corners of the vault, a cricket chirped.

"I'll be damned," Southgate said. "Even down here he has music."

Togo pulled back the flashlight and they inspected the bottom cut. The break was clean. "Slick as a whistle," Gershon commented. Next, they examined the bevel all around the square. When they were finished, Southgate turned to Togo. "Close to perfection," he said.

"Chalk one up for the laser," replied Togo. "When the block goes back in, it'll be nearly impossible to tell it has ever been out, especially from the inside."

Southgate laughed. "That's our intention."

"Let's get the ice," Togo said.

The three men exited from the tunnel and went upstairs to the garage, where they drove away in the van. At the corner of Dolan drive they turned right into U.S. 51 and rolled past Graceland to the Arctic Ice company five miles north.

Arctic Ice had been a wholesaler in cubes, crushed and block ice for more than eighty years. It was open twenty four hours a day the year around and supplied everyone from housewives buying several bags of cubes for a cocktail party to caterers who made huge ice sculptures for lavish club and convention dinners.



The conspirators bought four one hundred pound blocks, loaded them into the back of the van and returned to the Trimbles, where they carried each block to the tunnel entrance in a large, heavy gray tarpaulin. Then, the hard work began. One at a time, each block was dragged on the canvas through the tunnel to the chamber. Each trip was slow, torturous and sweaty with Gershon doing yeoman's service.

Finally, when the last block rested just outside the vault, Gershon lifted the end of the coffin closest to him and Southgate slipped a roll bar, six inches in diameter, underneath as far as possible, then a second one nearer the end. After that, Gershon gently lowered the casket and Togo turned on the laser and began cutting the first ice block into five inch thick pieces which Gershon and Southgate quickly slipped under and around the casket.

When the last block was cut and its pieces in place, ice covered the entire floor of the vault. Gershon again lifted the end of the coffin and Southgate removed the roll bars so the casket rested on the ice.

"Let's set up the winch," Togo said.

Half an hour later the steel cables of the winch were attached to the handles of the casket. Southgate called to Togo to turn on the power. The cables tightened and the casket began to move slowly from the vault onto a sled, guided by Gershon and Southgate, without leaving a mark. Once the ice melted and the water was sucked away there wouldn't be a trace of evidence as to how the casket had been removed.

Just then, a light flashed back down in the tunnel. Slowly, it came nearer. LN stepped into the chamber and watched the three men push the casket against the wall opposite Carrie's.

"You 're just in time," Southgate said, turning to LN. "We've got Elvis."

LN tiptoed forward, looking first on one side of the chamber, then the other. Gershon put his ear down on Elvis' casket. "I can hear him laughing," he said. "He'd really get a kick out of what we're doing." He looked up at Southgate. "He wouldn't want Weber to be governor either."

Southgate put his hand on Gershon's shoulder. "Let's take a look inside the vault," Southgate said.

The two men crawled inside. Southgate turned the flashlight on the far end. They moved closer. Near the top, across a light layer of grayish green mold, was a cut three feet long where the laser beam had struck.

Gershon examined it closely. "I can make it over so no one will ever see that mark," he said.

"And these?" Southgate asked, pointing to the cuts going downward.

"Those, too."

Gershon vanished into the tunnel. Five minutes later he returned with two buckets and re-entered the vault. "I need a light in here," he called out. Southgate crept inside with a flashlight which he held over Gershon's shoulder as he worked.

With quick, easy strokes, Gershon touched up the wall with the mix from one of the buckets. He stepped back. Southgate flashed the light on the area.

"The top cut needs more work," Gershon said.

He stepped forward with the other bucket. Southgate held the beam steady. Gershon made a dab near the left end of the line and another in the middle. He stepped back again. "That does it," he said after a moment's study.

"My feet are cold," Southgate said stomping on the ice.

Gershon picked up his buckets and lumbered out of the vault followed by Southgate, who motioned to Togo. "Let's get Carrie inside the vault," he said.

When the second casket was lined up with the hole in the vault, Gershon was on one side and Togo and Southgate in the other. Together, they moved the front charily onto the ice. Gershon then lifted the back end and Togo and Southgate each took a side. They pushed the casket cautiously forward. Like a helmsman on the River Styx, Gershon adjusted the casket's weight as it glided across the ice into place. As the ice melted, Carrie's casket settled onto the vault floor without a mark and the water was removed.

Together, the trio lifted the block, spread epoxy along the edges, and nudged it tightly back into the beveled frame. They braced it securely with several two by fours anchored into the ground.

"I'd say this calls for a celebration," LN said.

"Good idea," responded Southgate.

"I just happen to have a bottle of champagne upstairs," she said.

Everyone laughed.

Southgate uncorked a bottle of chilled Dom Perignon over the kitchen sink.

"Some treat," he said to LN as she reached into a cupboard beside him for glasses.

"We've come a long way," she replied.

"We haven't won the world series yet," Southgate said. "But I'd say we've done something comparable to capturing a pennant."

"Yeah," Gershon put in, "bring on the TV cameras."

LN placed the glasses on the table and Southgate poured. He lifted his to the center of the table. The others did likewise. The glasses clinked.

"Here's to Elvis," Southgate said.

"To Elvis," repeated the others.

The jangle of the telephone startled them. LN quickly drained her glass and picked up the receiver. All eyes were on her. She was silent for a moment, listening. Finally, she said, "This is Miss Walters."

She put her hand over the mouthpiece and whispered, "It's Mrs. Trimble."

Togo glanced at Southgate.

LN paused, listening again. "Everything is fine here," she said after a moment. "Yes, all's quiet and the neighbors are fine. How about you? Are you having a good time?"

LN nodded as she listened. "That's wonderful. I'm so glad."

She made a thumbs up motion to the others.

Southgate smiled and poured everyone another round.

"Now, don't worry about a thing. Just enjoy yourselves." LN shrugged her shoulders. "If anything goes wrong, I'll give you a call." Moments passed. "I'll be there to meet you, hear. Bye now." LN placed the phone back in its wall hook and turned to the others. "They're having a great time but she worries about the house."

"We'll give it a good cleaning when we leave," Togo said.

Southgate raised his glass again. "To the Trimble's, without whom this drink would not be possible."

"To the Trimble's," chanted the others.

Togo began to hum, then sing the words of "Take my body, Take my soul, Take my body with the rock 'n roll." One by one, the others joined in. As the words came forth, the four conspirators entwined their arms around each other, swaying as they sang. It was a scene wrapped in mysticism, the four of them moving in unison to the music, their bodies quivering and their faces etched with entrancement.

"This song should be published," LN said as the last note faded away. "I wish I knew the composer."

Southgate stole a quick glance at Togo. "If we had a contest with it, the writer might come forward. If not, the royalties, if any, could be held in escrow for the library."

"What kind of a contest, Brax?" LN asked.

343a

Southgate thought for a moment. "A sound-a-like contest. Entrants would be judged on how much they sounded like Elvis as they sang the song. We could make the contest a condition of our sale of the story to the networks."

"Wonderful," exclaimed LN.

"It's settled then," Southgate said. "I'll propose it when I contact the networks."

They began to sing again.

\*\*\*\* \*\*\*\* \*\*\*\*

## Chapter Thirty Four

The sky was clear and blue again the next morning. LN drove Southgate and Togo to the Memphis airport, where each of the men checked through a small suitcase at the Delta Air Lines ticket counter.

The clerk, a saucy brunette with a short feather cut, eyed the brown simulated leather tote bag in Southgate's hand. "Sir, that would ride easier in the luggage compartment."

Southgate shook his head. "No, I'll keep it with me."

She made another attempt. "It'll have to ride on the floor between your legs."

Southgate nodded and turned away. "I wouldn't want these to go astray," he said to his traveling companion, lightly jiggling the frequency hoppers.

Togo laughed. "Yeah, it's okay to chance losing our underwear, though."

"Better our underwear than our shirt," Southgate replied, his eyes straight and unblinking.

LN smiled. The three walked briskly along the concourse to the flight gate of the New York bound jet. It was a red letter day for them, the time for operation Elvis to go public. All of the preliminary work was done. The next step was to contact that great American marketplace for sensationalism, the television networks.



The responsibility for this was Southgate's. The others stood by to help if needed but he was now their main conduit for taking care of business, as Elvis would say. The burden for the balance of the project rested primarily on his shoulders. He was to be their sole negotiator.

"There's gate nineteen," Togo exclaimed, pointing ahead. The others saw it. "Flight 84. Departs New York City 10:03 a.m."

LN looked at her watch. "Fifteen minutes yet." The three of them huddled together in the concourse as other passengers boarded. "Good luck," she said. She kissed Southgate on the cheek, then, impulsively gave Togo a loving hug.

"We'll call you later today or tomorrow," Southgate said.

LN nodded. "Take care of yourselves."

Southgate and Togo showed their boarding passes to the gate attendant, gave LN a final wave and disappeared into the plane. Almost instantly, Southgate reappeared. He motioned to LN. "Don't forget to post the notices canceling our classes."

"I won't."

"Both mine and Togo's give the assignments for the rest of the week."

"Check," she said.

Inside the plane, the two men settled into their seats with the tote bag between Southgate's legs. "Well, old friend, I'm ready for a nap," Southgate said. He rested his head on the back of his seat and was asleep before the plane took off.

When he awoke, the big jet had begun its descent into La Guardia field. The steady roar of the engines had become a soft purr as the plane glided downward. For a moment, Southgate viewed the Manhattan skyline, then he turned to Togo. "Did you catch your own forty winks?" he asked.

His old friend shook his head. "I was just day dreaming."

The lines beside Southgate eyes crinkled. "About LN?"

Togo hesitated. "Yes," he answered finally. He felt his heart tighten.

Good naturedly, Southgate nodded. "You go for her, don't you?"

It seemed a real question. Togo smiled and answered, "she's alot of woman, Brax. I'm very fond of her. After a split second pause, he added, "I know you are too."

Southgate's eyes wandered about the cabin. His gaze returned to Togo at last. "In a different way, I think. LN and I are like a pair of old shoes, we're comfortable together through long wear. We enjoy a close companionship. But you love her. I don't."

Togo stared out the cabin window for a moment. "I always assumed otherwise about you."

"Everyone does. Until now that was fine. But that hug she gave you today was for real."

"You thought so, too?"

"It was pretty obvious."

The plane's wheels touched the runway and its engines boomed into reverse. Near the end of the field, the pitch changed and they quieted. The plane turned and lumbered toward the terminal.

Southgate looked directly at Togo. "I wouldn't waste any more time."

"I'm so used to thinking in terms of you and LN."

"You have my blessing."

After the plane came to a halt, Togo sat still for several moments before unfastening his seat belt. He rose slowly, as if his thoughts were elsewhere.

"We're back to earth," Southgate said, picking up the tote bag.

Togo laughed. "Maybe you are."

The thoughts of LN faded into the bustle of the terminal. After a short wait to pick up their luggage, the two men hailed a cab.

"Where to, Mac?" the cabbie asked.

"The Plaza," Southgate told him.

Back in Memphis that afternoon, Van Weber put aside his official duties and pressed down a button on his inter-com.

"Yes, sir?" a pleasant woman's voice answered.

"Libby, get me Charley Jones on the phone, please." As an afterthought, the Shelby county district attorney general added, "before you do that, pour me a cool glass of wine."

"Yes, sir."

A moment later, a pretty blonde entered the high ceilinged courthouse office and went directly to a cabinet of richly paneled wood, where she opened a small refrigerator and removed a bottle of imported German wine. Weber liked sweet, white wines. This particular bottle was a spatlese, 1975 vintage.

The woman, with a deft flick of her wrist, pulled the cork from the bottle opened the previous day and emptied the cool, amber liquid into a chilled goblet. She wiped the fog from the outside of the glass with a small towel and handed the law officer his drink. He sipped it greedily.

"Ambrosia, Libby, pure ambrosia."

Weber had discovered his taste for sweet wines on a vacation with his wife a decade earlier in the grape growing regions of West Germany. Since then, it had been his custom to stop work in mid-afternoon for a relaxing drink.

Spatlese, which translated means "late picking," was his favorite. He'd delved into its history to find that spatleses are made from special grapes left on the vine to further ripen for two or three weeks after the regular harvest. This let them turn semi-raisiny with a sugar crust. Weber learned that the purpose was to increase the sugar content of the wine and give it a fuller body and flavor.

Weber took a full swallow. "Now, I'm ready for Charley."

Charley Jones was the chief executive officer of the Second Tennessee bank and a fellow member of the prestigious Secret Society of the Boll Weevils, one of the eight historic krewes of the Cotton Carnival. This year the Shelby county district attorney general was the Grand Bug of his organization.

Libby left, closing the door behind her. A short time later the inter-com on Weber's desk buzzed. He pushed down a button. "I have Mr. Jones for you."

Weber picked up the telephone on another corner of his desk, still holding the wine goblet in his other hand. "Hello, Charley, It's almost D-day. How are we coming with the money exhibit?"

"We'll have it ready, Van, don't your worry."

"All two million?"

"Every dollar."

"That's exciting. Not many people have ever seen that much money in one place."

"I haven't."

"The perfect example. Even you, a bank president, will be a spectator in the lobby of his own institution."

"You'll have to stop by for an early peek, Van. The glass case, with all its electronic security devices, is going in tomorrow. We want to test it for a few days."

"I want to. I want to."

The money display was Weber's idea, as a project for the boll weevils, to show the daily contribution cotton made to the economy of Memphis and he was the display's most enthusiastic supporter. As the Grand Bug of his krewe, he'd overseen the plans and guided the work. Now, he was eager to see the results of his labors.

"When shall I come over?" he asked.

"How about noon tomorrow and I'll treat you to lunch in our executive dining room."

"Outstanding. I'll see you then."

Weber set the receiver down in its cradle. He leaned back in his tall, blue leather judge's chair and savored another sip of the spatlese while he considered the pleasures of holding the noble title of Grand Bug.

Togo and Southgate arose early the next morning. After a hearty breakfast they took a taxi to Grand Central station, where they set up shop in the last booth in a row of twelve telephones. Southgate slipped his coins into the slot and dialed.

"Good morning, Continental Broadcasting Corporation," an efficient sounding woman's voice answered.

Southgate glanced at his wristwatch. The time was 10:10. "Good morning," he replied. "Kyd Jordan, please."

"One moment."

Southgate heard several clicks and a woman's voice said, "Mr. Jordan's office."

"This is Police Chief Murphy," Southgate said boldly. "I'd like to talk to Kyd."

"Just a minute, chief," the voice advised. "He just walked in."

Southgate waited patiently on hold until a deep baritone voice said, "Kyd Jordan speaking. How are you chief?"

"Sorry to mislead you, Mr. Jordan, but I'm not Chief Murphy," Southgate said apologetically, then quickly added, "I do have the story of the year for you, however."

Kyd Jordan snorted resignedly. "They all say that." Almost wearily he said, "What's yours?"

Southgate relaxed. He knew he could say his piece now. "It involves a world famous personality but I don't want to discuss the matter over the telephone."

"Who's the personality?" the journalist interrupted.

"Let's put it this way, Mr. Jordan, I have an important story for you. There are conditions on it. If you're interested, I want further discussion of my terms to take place over a frequency hopper I'll provide. You can signal your willingness tonight with the code phrase, 'now a word from my friendly sponsor.' "

Abruptly, Southgate hung up. In quick succession, he delivered the same message to the anchormen at CBS, NBC and ABC.

Kyd Jordan peered at the silent receiver in frustration. He wanted to hear more. He prided himself on his nose for news and despite the vagueness of the voice's information his instincts told him to follow up the call. He looked at the words he scribbled on his note pad as the voice talked. Discouraged at their sparcity, he shook his head and buzzed his secretary. "Is Clay in?"

"I'll check, Mr. Jordan."

"If he's around, ask him to come see me."

Jordan took off his suit coat and hung it in his closet. Clayton Granger, producer of CNC's "The Nightly News," stuck his curly gray head around the door.

"You wanted to see me, Kyd?"

"I've just had a strange call. Ordinarily, I'd write it off as one more crank but I've got a gut feeling I ought to follow through on this one. There was something about the way he came across."

Jordan quickly outlined the sparse details.

"That's not much for a commitment by us."

"It's only a promise to talk further. It's nothing concrete as far as any terms go."



"What if he turns out to be a nut- a crazy bombthrower. We'd only be encouraging him for the ultimate letdown. Then what?"

"C'mon, Clay, we get all kinds of cranks already."

Granger looked Jordan straight in the eye. "Alright, you make the judgment call then."

"Include the code phrase tonight."

In early afternoon, Southgate called LN at her office on the Delta campus. "I've talked to all four networks and I need a couple of monitors," he explained.

"Which channels?" she questioned.

"You and Gershon split NBC and ABC between you. Togo and I'll watch Continental and CBS from here."

"How'd your calls go?"

"Kyd Jordan seemed genuinely interested. The others so-so. I had the feeling they thought I was just another crank."

"We only need one."

"It would be slick to have them bid against each other."

"Are we listening for the original code phrase?"

"Check," Southgate said, then added, "there's someone here who wants to talk to you."

He stepped back and handed the receiver to Togo.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi yourself," LN replied, a lilt in her voice.

"How're things?"

"It's beautiful here."

"New York, too."

"Well, don't take too large a bite from the Big Apple," she laughed. Serious again, she asked, "will you be home for the opening of the Cotton Carnival Friday night?"

"Depends on our negotiations."

"I'll be anxious to see you."

"Same here."

He turned to Southgate. "Anything else to say to LN?" Southgate shook his head and Togo signed off.

Southgate opened the door between the adjoining hotel rooms. "For God's sake listen carefully," he admonished.

"You, too," Togo replied. "Somehow, I feel this is the most crucial moment since we started."

"Agreed. It would be awful to arrange a party and have nobody come."

Togo walked over to the television set in his room and tuned in the CBS network station in New York City. He glanced at his watch, which read six minutes until seven o'clock. He adjusted the sound, then stepped back and sat down on his bed to wait.

Through the open doorway he saw Southgate adjust an identical set in his own room. Togo nervously loosened his tie. The minutes ticked by. His eyes were glued to the screen. The CBS logo appeared and dissolved into the network newsroom in New York.

"The CBS Evening News with PeterFord," a voice-over boomed.

The anchorman appeared with the customary stern look on his face. "Good evening. In the mideast today, Israel unexpectedly softened its demands for new negotiations with the Arab states over the Palestinian issue." Togo raised an eyebrow. "The Israeli move came in an address to the Knesset by the Prime Minister in which he outlined the Jewish state's continuing efforts to bring peace to that strife ridden area of the world. And now from our correspondent in Tel Aviv."

Togo leaned back on his bed. In the adjoining room Southgate watched Kyd Jordan on the Continental channel. "The reaction from the PLO was immediate," Jordan said. "Yasser Arafat, the Arab organization leader said the Israeli statement didn't bring the two factions one grain of sand closer to peace. We go now to our correspondent in Beirut for an exclusive interview with the PLO chieftan."

Southgate anxiously tapped a foot on the floor. Jordan reappeared on the screen and the program broke for a commercial without a mention of the code phrase. He stuck his head in Togo's room with one ear still cocked toward his own TV. "Anything?"

"Not yet."

Southgate gave his full attention to the screen again as Kyd Jordan appeared again. The newscaster's next story covered the day's events in Washington. Then he moved on to an earthquake in Central America. Southgate continued to listen intently as Jordan said, "For American motorists there's good news. A large oil strike is reported in northwest Canada near the Arctic Circle. Early estimates predict one of the major finds of the last twenty years. This word, coupled with a continuing glut of mideast oil on the world market, leads government officials to believe the downward drop in gasoline prices will continue. Some experts predict that gasoline will sell for as low as one dollar and ten cents a gallon by early next year."

The camera zoomed in for a closeup on Jordan. He paused and stared straight into its lens, a sly look on his face. "Now a word from my friendly sponsor."

"Wahoo," Southgate shouted and jumped up from his chair. His arms shot above his head as he danced a little jig around the room. "Jordan bought it. Jordan bought it." He reached down and lowered the volume of his set and joined Togo.

"Jordan accepted," he whispered.

"Great," Togo said as CBS faded into yet another commercial without any acknowledgement of Southgate's call. "That's two opportunities gone," Togo told his co-conspirator.

"Don't give up yet," Southgate encouraged.

The two sat in silence and watched the next segment of news. Again there was a commercial interruption without results. "Doesn't look good," Togo said dejectedly.

"You maybe right."

Ford signed off. "We're still batting five hundred," Togo said.

"I never did think we'd get all four of them," Southgate said. He reached for the telephone and called LN. "How'd we do?" he asked immediately when she answered.

"Zilch," she replied.

"Cheer up. Kyd Jordan came through," Southgate said.

"I always did like him." Southgate could feel her smile through the telephone.

"Well, sit tight while I contact Jordan," Southgate told her. He hung up the receiver and turned to Togo. "I'm going to shower. Then let's have a celebration dinner."

"I'll be ready in fifteen minutes," Togo replied, an inflection of victory in his voice.

\*\*\* \*\*

## Chapter Thirty Five

Early the next morning, Southgate thumbed through the yellow pages of the telephone directory in search of a messenger service. "Here's one," he said to Togo placing a finger on a small ad two-thirds of the way down the column. "Gotham Messenger Service. Open 24 hours. Uniformed couriers. Deliver anything- anywhere."

He put the phone to his ear and touched the push buttons. Rhythmic electronic beeps transmitted the number. A male voice answered, "Gotham Messenger Service. Clarke." Southgate arranged for a messenger to pick up an envelope in forty minutes from the bell captain at the New York Hilton, several blocks from the Plaza.

"And the name, please?"

"Williamson."

Southgate replaced the receiver and placed a key to a locker in Grand Central station in a manila envelope, sealed it and printed KYD JORDAN, CBC, ROCKEFELLER CENTER on the outside. On another, larger envelope, he printed GOTHAM MESSENGER SERVICE. In the latter, he put the money to pay for the service and the smaller envelope to Kyd Jordan.

Thirty five minutes later, he and Togo stood in the bright, contemporary lobby of the Hilton with their eyes fixed on the entrance. In a short time, an attractive, young black woman appeared, dressed in a neat, green uniform and cap with the words GOTHAM MESSENGER SERVICE stitched above the breast pocket.

The two men watched as she stepped up to the desk of the bell captain, who, after a short conversation, reached in a drawer and handed her the envelope. She turned and hurried from the lobby into the street.

The Ace Rent-A-Truck agency's garage was in an industrial area on the lower east side.

"How long do youse guys want dis?" the dispatcher asked. He was flat nosed and barrel chested. One eye turned outward and made him an ugly man.

"When do you close?" Southgate asked.

"Nine o'clock. If youse ain't back by den, youse gotta pay anudder day."

"Fair enough," Southgate replied.

Togo opened his wallet and gave the man five twenties for their deposit. In return, he was handed the ignition key and the rental contract which had been made up in advance after Southgate's call.

"Number eleven," the clerk said. "It's all gassed up and ready to go."

Togo and Southgate exited. The garage smelled of oil and grease. In back, several mechanics huddled over engines. When they reached their panel truck, the two men from Memphis pulled coveralls from their tote bag, took off their suit coats and slipped into the work clothes. Togo climbed behind the steering wheel and turned on the motor as Southgate settled into the passenger seat.

Togo eased the truck out into the heavy traffic and headed for Rockefeller Center. Southgate pulled a frequency hopper from the tote bag and looked at his watch. Eleven-thirty. His first call to Jordan was scheduled for noon per instructions sent in his letter with the messenger. He hoped he'd given Jordan enough time to pick up the frequency hopper left for him in the locker at Grand Central.

Togo maneuvered the panel truck to the curb in front of the big gray office building. Southgate climbed to the rear and looked out the back windows. Gazing upward, he thought, "He's there, forty floors above us." Southgate checked his watch again. Eleven fifty-seven. He called to Togo, "If you see anything suspicious drive away." He scanned the lunch hour strollers crowding the sidewalk. Eleven fifty-eight. He stirred restlessly and raised the aerial on his frequency hopper. Down the street a traffic light changed. Eleven fifty-nine. A horn honked. Southgate watched the seconds tick by on his watch. Twelve o'clock.

He flicked the radio's switch on. "This is Hound Dog," he said in a low, even voice. "Are you there, Kyd Jordan?"



"I'm here," came the reply. The newscaster mentioned the warble in the sound caused by a variable delay circuit Southgate had installed in his frequency hopper for random distortion.

Southgate's heart jumped. "That's to disguise my voice," he said. "Now, let's get down to business."

"The ball's in your court."

Southgate's throat was dry. He swallowed and moistened his lips. "This involves Elvis Presley."

"He's dead," came the prompt reply.

"I have his body."

There was a moment's silence. "Jesus," Jordan muttered.

"It's your story for two million dollars and two minutes of air time."

"I can't promise you that."

"That's my price plus the network sponsorship of an Elvis music contest."

"Who are you?"

"Just call me Hound Dog."

"Well, the name's appropriate enough," Jordan replied. "The song was certainly one of Elvis' biggest hits."

"It all ties together."

Forty floors up, beads of sweat dotted Jordan's forehead. "What'll we do?" he scribbled on a piece of paper and shoved it over to Granger sitting beside him. "We need more time. Stall," Granger mouthed.

"We need more time," Jordan said aloud. "How can I get back to you?"

"How much time?"

"I don't know."

"You're stalling," Southgate said flatly.

Jordan glanced at Granger in consternation. "Three hours," he begged. "Give us three hours."

"Fair enough," Southgate said quickly. "I'll contact you at three o'clock." The air went dead.

"What'll we do?" Granger asked.

"Talk to the old man," Jordan replied.

The anchorman and his producer stepped off of the elevator into the hush of the carpeted, fiftieth floor foyer of CBC's executive suite.

"He's expecting you, gentleman," the lone occupant, a receptionist encased in a large circular desk, said with her ready smile. "Go right in."

Paul Wiley's office had the lovely smell of rich leather furniture and highly waxed teakwood walls. Original paintings by a number of old European masters dotted the walls. In one corner, a lighted, glassed cabinet displayed an impressive array of broadcasting awards accumulated over an illustrious career spanning half a century in which Wiley, more often than not, had lived up to his name.

As they stepped forward, the shoes of the two men sunk into an elegant Persian rug in soft colors which covered much of the dark parquet floor. Several beautiful pieces of Steuben crystal showed to advantage on two occasional tables off to one side.

"Hello Kyd. Hello Clay," Wiley said politely, with an easy charm. "Sit down."

They lowered themselves into chairs in front of the large paperless desk and waited.

At the age of seventy, Wiley was still a handsome man, fine boned with a thin arched nose and piercing gray eyes. He'd brought the network up from nothing to more than a hundred stations. He'd worked hard. He wanted to be first. Although from a well-to-do family, he'd never had that special indifference of those born well off.

Several years earlier, he'd turned most of the day to day operations over to younger men, but he still remained the chief executive officer and chairman. He'd made it clear he would continue to call the big ones.

"Well, gentlemen, what's on your mind?" He laid his arms on his desk and leaned forward, the ever present expensive cigar in his mouth.

Kyd Jordan swallowed hard. "I need your decision on a story."

Wiley's face settled into a mold. The mood in the room shifted to a curious tension. "I've never interfered with the judgment of the news department," he said.

"This is different, sir," Jordan said. "A man calling himself, Hound Dog, claims he has Elvis Presley's body. He's offered us the story for two million dollars."

Wiley's expression didn't change, but his eyes did. There was a flicker of excitement in them that Jordan and Granger noted. "That's a lot of money," he said. "But a story of that magnitude might be worth it to us right now. We're in the middle of the spring sweeps."

The ratings sweeps, Jordan said to himself. Why didn't I think of that? He looked at Wiley in awe. As the chairman sat, thinking, nothing was active but his thin, hairless hands. These tumbled one over the other on the desktop. His face was proud, shrewd and inscrutable.

Finally, a smile edged outward from the corners of his mouth. "A story like that would pull a phenomenal audience." He looked directly at Jordan. "Has this Hound Dog talked to the other networks?"

Jordan's voice, normally strong and powerful, was low as he said, "I don't think so. He gave a flat figure. There's no indication we're in a bidding war."

Wiley nodded once, crisply. "As always during sweeps, we're under a lot of pressure from our local stations to jazz up network programming."

"I know," Jordan replied. He was well aware that all TV stations lived and died by the sweeps. The results determined advertising rates and agencies based their purchases of air time on sweeps' figures. Since audiences were measured in every TV market in the country then, networks wanted their local affiliates to show up well. Consequently, Jordan knew networks and their local stations made special efforts to surpass their rivals in programming during those quarterly samplings of four weeks each.

Wiley tapped his fingers lightly on the desk top. "We did well during the winter count, but with Hound Dog's proposal we might win all the marbles this time." The spring sweeps always came in April and May between Easter and Memorial day. The survey avoided holidays that might lure viewers away from their sets.

"It could give us a big bulge in the ratings," Jordan enthused.

"If handled correctly, yes," Wiley cautioned. "Tell me more about this Hound Dog."

Jordan's eyes came up. "As I said, he's asked for two million dollars for the story. In addition, he wants two minutes of air time."

Wiley interrupted. "What for?"

Jordan hesitated, thrown off balance. "I don't know. I said then I couldn't make the decision and I asked for more time. He gave us three hours."

"Anything else?"

"He wants us to sponsor an Elvis sound-a-like contest for young singers."

"Quite a promoter."

"Perhaps. He may have other motives."

"A crackpot?"

"I don't think so. He was different. He didn't espouse any causes. It seemed like a straight business deal." Jordan paused. "At the same time, there was an undercurrent of something more."

The old man nodded. "When he calls back, I'll talk to him."

Both Granger and Jordan were visibly relieved. Jordan stifled a nervous yawn. "How much flak will we get for paying for the story?" he asked, aware of the controversy swirling around checkbook journalism.

"We're not playing parlor games," Wiley snapped back. "This could mean millions to us in additional revenues. I'm not going to disclose the terms. What goes on here is only among the three of us."

Jordan and Granger gave quick nods of understanding.

"This is larger than someone's wallet," Wiley said, calm again.

"We're dealing with a legend here." His voice was deep, rich with many overtones. "We can claim credit for a public service in getting Presley's body back."

"Yes, sir," Jordan replied.

At four minutes until three o'clock, Togo eased the van out of 52d street into Fifth avenue and headed south to Rockefeller Center. Southgate was in the back, ready to contact Kyd Jordan again on the frequency hopper.

The van slowed at the towering office complex, where Togo pulled into the curb and rolled to a stop. The famous thoroughfare was quieter now. The sidewalk crowds had thinned. As the seconds ticked by, Togo casually rested his arm on the open window ledge and glanced into the van's rear view mirror.

"Oh! Oh!" he muttered. Forty feet back, a mounted policeman approached on a handsome chestnut brown horse. Togo twisted quickly around. "Brax, the fuzz is coming. Shall I pull away?"

Southgate peered out of the back windows. The nostrils of the big animal were even with the vehicle. It was too late to move so Southgate pressed his body lengthwise against the street side of the van and put his head down.

The policeman halted his mount and bent over toward Togo. "How long you gonna be here?" he shouted.

Togo swallowed. "Just a few minutes. We're making a delivery."

The officer perused the van. "What're you hauling?"

After a moment's hesitation, Togo replied, "Typewriters. The last one just went inside."

"What's wrong with your buddy?" the officer asked, pointing a nightstick toward Southgate.

"Just tired. We started out at five-thirty this morning."

Southgate could feel a pair of eyes examining him. He nudged the frequency hopper deeper into the side of his stomach but he didn't look up.

"All right, finish your job," the policeman said irritably. "Then, get out of here. You fellas are always fouling up traffic."

"We gotta make a living."

As the officer rode on, Southgate scrambled to the back windows and pulled up the aerial on his frequency hopper. A glance at his watch showed the time at two minutes after three.

High above, Wiley waited in his office with his anchorman and Granger. He looked at Jordan. "Do you suppose something has happened?"

"Possibly. He was right on the second before." Jordan unobtrusively checked his own frequency hopper to make sure it was on.

Like a veil, the silence returned. The three sat nervously on the edges of their chairs, listening. A slight crackle sounded, followed by a voice. "This is Hound Dog. Kyd Jordan, are you there?"

"I'm here, Hound Dog. Paul Wiley, the chairman of the network is with me. He'll do the talking this time."

"Hello, Mr. Wiley, It's an honor to have such a distinguished businessman aboard."

Wiley emitted a soft, benevolent laugh. "Now, no soft soap, Hound Dog. Let's get down to work. What's this story you have for us?"

"I've got Elvis. I've offered the story to Jordan for two million dollars."

"And also some other considerations, I understand."

"That's right. I want two minutes of air time to sell for myself and the sponsorship by CBC of an Elvis sound-a-like contest."



"Those are tall orders, Hound Dog," Wiley said. He was brief, efficient and confident. "To whom would you sell the time?"

"Perhaps to the highest bidder, I'm not sure. I'm more inclined to judge by the message to be delivered as well as the money."

Wiley became even more alert. Images of the highest ratings in TV history pranced through his agile mind. If hyped right, this could surpass the Super Bowl in viewers, he thought to himself. "Explain that a little more," he said.

"I'd like the time to be used for a pitch for some worthwhile cause. I don't know who'd respond, of course. But say the boat people wanted to plead for a free Viet Nam again. If they had the money, I'd consider them seriously. There'd be an open invitation to anyone in the world to bid."

"I see. When would this take place?"

"As soon as possible."

"Where?"

"I'd screen them in Memphis. I'd leave the location of the telecast to you."

"What about Elvis?"

"He'll be returned to his tomb as soon as my conditions are fulfilled."

"What proof do we have he's even gone?"

"Open the tomb."

"And discover a hoax. No, Hound Dog, you'll have to do better than that. Give me proof you have Elvis. If you do that, we have a deal. I'll throw every resource CBC has behind your scheme to auction off two minutes of time." Wiley moistened his lips in anticipation. "It should catch the entire world's fancy."

"How about the sound-a-like contest?"

"Logistically, it will be difficult. You're not giving us much time."

"It doesn't have to be anything fancy. I'd like to have it in Memphis."

"That can be arranged."

"Things seem to be in order, then. I'll have your proof in Memphis in forty-eight hours. I'll contact Kyd Jordan at the Peabody hotel there beginning at noon tomorrow." He paused. "One more thing. I'll drop a song in the mail I'd like sung in the sound-a-like contest."

There was a click in the frequency hopper. "He's signed off," Jordan said.

"There was nothing more to say," Wiley commented.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Thirty Six

Southgate and Togo arrived back in Memphis shortly before midnight. LN and Gershon met them at the airport. "I drove your car, Brax," she said. "All of us wouldn't fit in mine."

"Good. We can talk on the ride home," Southgate replied.

After a short wait for luggage, the four conspirators were on their way with Southgate behind the wheel. "We have one problem," he said. "CBC wants proof we have Elvis before it will cough up the money."

"We should have anticipated that better," Togo sighed.

"Let's not second guess ourselves," Southgate said. "Let's put our heads together for a solution."

"How about a photograph?" Gershon suggested.

"Only if all else fails," replied Southgate as the convertible came to a stop for a red light.

LN took Togo's hand in the back seat. "Margaret Jean mentioned once that Axelbank had some confidential medical records on Elvis," she said. "Would they help us?"

Southgate's eyes brightened. "Can we get them?"

"I'd have to ask her."

"We ought to look at them," Southgate continued. "There might be something in them we could use. An obscure scar, maybe, or a birthmark.

"Or seven toes," Gershon put in. Everyone laughed.

"When can you talk to Margaret Jean?" Southgate asked, half turning around to face LN, who blinked as she thought of Axelbank's tattoo.

"Would morning be soon enough?"

"What will you tell her?" Togo asked.

"Whoa," Southgate warned. "One thing at a time. First, an answer for LN. Call her early tomorrow and feel her out. Now, Togo, your question."

Togo smiled and repeated his query. LN said, "I'll tell her I'm interested in them for the library. That seems innocent enough. She's very high on the library. Because of it, she might give me a peek."

"Does she have access to them?" Southgate asked.

"That's the big mystery. I don't know. When she first told me about them, I don't think she did."

"Let's hope the situation has changed," Togo said.

"Amen to that," Gershon exclaimed.

By now, the car was along the outskirts of the Delta campus. "Does anyone want coffee and sandwiches?" LN asked. "I'd be glad to fix them."

Gershon piped up immediately. "I'm kind of hungry." Everyone laughed again.

"You haven't even been away," Southgate said, his eyes still smiling.

LN arose shortly after seven o'clock the next morning in the Trimble's house and telephoned Margaret Jean at her home. "Are you up?" she asked when her friend answered.

"Just barely," Margaret Jean said.

"Awake enough to talk?"

"Oh, sure. My coffee's on."

"You mentioned once that Mr. Upside Down Face had some of Elvis' medical records."

"That night at the Peabody." Margaret Jean giggled as she recalled the conversation about Axelbank's tattoo. "I told you things I shouldn't have."

LN chortled, a low, intimate sound of a fellow conspirator. It was exactly the tone to buoy her friend's confidence. Her voice warm, she asked, "Does he still have the records?"

"As far as I know," Margaret Jean answered matter-of-factly. "They're in his safe."

"Is there any way we can look at them."

"I don't know the combination."

"But we know where it is," LN prompted.

This time, Margaret Jean roared with laughter. "We couldn't," she said at last, a teasing ring to her voice. "That would be naughty."

"It might be rather pleasing to Alan."

"Maybe to all of us." And Margaret Jean laughed again. Then, she asked seriously, "Why do you want them, LN."

"For the library. I could make copies. Then we could return them."

"It would serve him right after refusing a donation," Margaret Jean said.

LN responded quickly, "There's a certain amount of poetic justice in it."

"All right," Margaret Jean said firmly. "Let's do him in."

LN struggled to contain her excitement. She held her breath for a moment, then asked cautiously, "When?"

"Tonight," Margaret Jean blurted impulsively. "Why wait?" She laughed again. "This is going to be fun."

"Where should we meet?" LN asked.

"Just come to his office around five-fifteen. I'll take care of everything else." After a pause she added, "We'll need a few things. Can you bring a magnifying glass and flashlight?"

"I'll bring them," LN volunteered.

"Bring some finger nail polish remover, too."

"See you then," Margaret Jean said cheerily.

LN heard a click in her receiver. She replaced it gently in the cradle and donned an old sweatshirt and bluejeans. A few minutes later she was in the basement busily draining the swimming pool that had been used in digging the tunnel. Southgate had decided the night before that it was time to dismantle their equipment.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Thirty Seven

In mid-morning, Kyd Jordan, as planned, checked quietly into the Peabody hotel. Clay Granger and a camera crew were to follow him to Memphis later that afternoon.

Jordan tipped the bellboy and looked around his suite. Then, before unpacking, he thumbed through the Memphis telephone book until he came to the listings for Shelby county. Hastily, he scribbled a number on a scratch pad and dialed.

"District Attorney General Weber's office," his secretary, Libby, answered.

"This is Kyd Jordan of CBC," His voice was deep and even. "Is it possible to speak to Mr. Weber?"

Libby shuddered involuntarily. She was used to local newsmen calling. She'd even dated one. But this was an occasion. A nationally famous anchorman had never telephoned before. "Just a moment, sir," she said, simultaneously pressing the button on Weber's inter-com.

"Yes, Libby?"

"Mr. Weber, Kyd Jordan, the CBC anchorman, wants to talk to you."

The first thing Weber thought of was the governorship. "Put him on." When he heard the click, he said, "This is Weber."



"Mr. Weber, I'd like to exchange some information with you in return for your cooperation in an investigation. Is that possible?"

Weber recognized the voice immediately. "What is the information, Mr. Jordan?"

"Could we meet privately?"

"Certainly. But, aren't you in New York?"

"I'm in Memphis, Mr. Weber."

"But, I watched you last night."

"I flew in this morning." Again, Jordan pressed for answer. "Could I see you sometime today?"

"Would this afternoon be all right?"

"Fine," Jordan said, thinking of his call scheduled at noon from Hound Dog. "Where would it be best to see you?"

"Do you have any qualms about coming to my office?" Weber asked.

"No. I would prefer to keep my visit quiet, however. Just between the two of us."

"How about two-thirty?"

"That will be fine. I'll see you then."

Jordan unpacked after hanging up the phone. Then he plopped down on the bed and waited, the frequency hopper beside him.

Gershon was behind the steering wheel of his van as it cruised along Union avenue outside of the hotel. Southgate sat beside him, feeling more at ease than he had in New York City.

"Circle the block," he instructed his companion. "In New York we parked before transmitting because of the high buildings. The skyline is flatter here. I want to test the hopper's efficiency in a moving vehicle."

Gershon nodded and kept going. Southgate glanced at his watch. The time was still several minutes until noon. So, he rested the hopper on one leg and gazed at the pedestrians crowding the downtown streets at lunchtime that Friday. The van turned into Second street, quickly traversed the west side of the Peabody, and moved into Gayoso avenue headed east.

Southgate watched the second hand on his watch tick away. Twenty. Ten. Five. One. He switched on his frequency hopper. "Are you there, Kyd Jordan?" he asked. "This is Hound Dog."

"I'm here," Jordan replied.

"Welcome to Memphis. Do you have anything to report?"

"No, Hound Dog, I don't. I'm sitting tight waiting for your proof."

"That's in the works." The van turned north in Third street and headed back toward Union.

"Why don't you take me to Elvis?"

"No, that's out."

"You could blindfold me."

"Fraid not. The only contact we're going to have is via the frequency hoppers."

7

"You're a cautious man, Hound Dog."

"There's no need to rush." Earlier, LN had told Southgate about her recruitment of Margaret Jean. He would wait for that outcome before proceeding further. "Have a nap and a pleasant dinner. I'll signal you again at eight o'clock tonight."

"I hope I'm not on a wild goose chase, Hound Dog."

Southgate flipped off the hopper and lowered the aerial as the van swung into Second street again. He glanced sideways at Gershon. "He sounds antsy."

"I hope he doesn't do anything foolish," Gershon replied.

"He's anxious to get going. It's hard for a newsman to sit on a big story."

"I suppose so," Gershon said. The van turned right and headed up Gayoso to Front street above the river. After several blocks, Gershon turned east into Poplar and drove to Second, where he turned South and headed back toward Union. The van was in the middle of the downtown area now. As it passed the courthouse at Adams street, Southgate glanced out the window. There striding along the sidewalk was Weber.

"I wonder where he's headed," Southgate said anxiously.

"Shall we tail him?"

"Pull over to the curb. Let him get a little ahead of us first."

Gershon eased the van to a stop. After a few moments, he crept forward again about seventy feet behind the district attorney general.

"Do you think he's going to meet Jordan?" Gershon asked, his eyes on Weber.

"He's walking that way," Southgate replied. They drove on in silence as Weber crossed Jefferson avenue and remained so halfway into the next block. Then, Southgate continued. "We want them together. But this would be a little soon. I'd like to have the pay-off first."

"That may be impossible," said Gershon.

"Probably. But I hoped Jordan would wait for our proof before contacting Weber. If there is one thing we don't need when we pick up the money it's a lot of cops around."

At the next intersection, Madison avenue, Weber turned. As Southgate and Gershon watched, he disappeared into the Second Tennessee bank.

"That's a relief," Southgate said. He sighed and let out a long breath.

"Maybe it's payday," suggested Gershon. "It's Friday."

"A possibility," Southgate said, smiling. Gershon speeded up the van and turned east into Union. for the drive home.

Inside the bank lobby, Weber approached the money exhibit he'd spawned. A chain covered with a royal blue felt surrounded the glass enclosed case and two armed guards stood at attention at the entrance way. A red ribbon stretched between two stanchions.

Charley Jones was there along with a bevy of other bank officials and the press. Piled neatly inside the case were two million dollars. "Van, they want you and me to cut the ribbon," the bank chairman said, motioning to the reporters.

"I'm game," Weber said, eager for the publicity in connection with his quest for the governorship. "Where do they want us?"

A television cameraman stepped forward and guided the two men to the middle of the ribbon. "No sissors," he said looking around. Everyone laughed. A minor official stepped up with an extra large pair. "Here they are," he said, handing them to Jones.

"You hold one blade, Mr. Jones, and you the other, Mr. Weber," the cameraman said. He stepped back, flanked by the other photographers. As the film rolled, the two men snipped the ribbon, then stepped inside the chained off area and viewed the money.

"Your idea for this exhibit was a good one, Van," Jones said. "It fits right into the carnival. Our cotton merchants here in Memphis sell more than forty per cent of the national crop each year."

Weber beamed. As he walked back to his office, however, his thoughts were on Kyd Jordan.

Promptly, at two-thirty, Jordan appeared at the courthouse. Libby was all a flutter as she ushered him into Weber's office and closed the door. As soon as they were alone, Weber invited the newscaster to sit down. "How can I help you?" he asked.

Jordan sized Weber up for a moment, then proceeded. "For the last two days I've been in contact by radio with a man who calls himself Hound Dog. He claims he has Elvis Presley's body."

Weber's pulse jumped, but he kept his face carefully noncommittal, heedful not to displease the newsman. "Do you believe this?"

"We've asked for proof."

"Meanwhile?"

"We're marking time. But CBC doesn't want to be in a position of obstructing an investigation. I want to cooperate with you."

"I appreciate that," Weber said. "Tell me, when did you first hear from this person, Hound Dog?"

"In New York on Tuesday. That was by telephone. Later, he sent me a frequency hopper to use."

"A what?" Weber asked, a baffled look on his face.

"A frequency hopper," Jordan repeated. "It's a radio which constantly changes channels to avoid detection. In addition, his voice warbled, a ploy that made it even more difficult to recognize. I'm told the warble was created by a variable delay circuit specially installed in the hopper."

"That's very clever," Weber commented as he continued to cross-question Jordan. "When did you last talk to him?"

"At noon today."

"Here in Memphis?"

Jordan nodded.

"Has he promised proof?"

"He talks a good game. He said he'll have it. I've no way of knowing."

Weber thought for a moment. "I'd like to be kept informed," he said agreeably. "But as it stands now, there's nothing for my office to do."

Jordan nodded again. "I'd like us to concur on an exchange," he said after a moment. "I expect an exclusive break on the story in return for my cooperation."

"I'm planning on running for governor," Weber said. "I'd like to be interviewed on camera as the investigation progresses."

"That would be natural enough," Jordan replied.

"All right. I'll do everything I can to keep you ahead of the other reporters once the story breaks. The first disclosure, of course, is yours."

Jordan stood. "I'll be back in touch with you as soon as I know more." He hesitated. "Perhaps I should have your home phone number in case there's a development during the night."

Weber scribbled down the number and handed it to Jordan, who folded the paper and slipped it into his pocket."

As they walked toward the door, Weber asked, "Where are you staying?"

"The Peabody," Jordan replied. "Suite 908. If anything develops out of your office, please call me."

"I will, Mr. Jordan. You can count on me."

The two men shook hands. Weber closed his office door again after the newsman left and went directly to a private telephone on his desk. He dialed a number and waited.

"Hello, Uncle Tim? This is Van. Say, is everything quiet out there at Graceland?"

"Peaceful and orderly," Weber heard his uncle reply.

"I'm lucky to have you as chief of security there, Uncle Tim.

It's reassuring."

"Did you think something was wrong, Van?"

"I had some concern, yes. Is the gravesite okay?"

"I'm in the security station right beside it now. Everything is fine."

"Well, thanks, Uncle Tim."

"Anytime, Van."

Weber hung up the phone and scratched his head as he pondered Kyd Jordan's visit.

Togo met his companions at Southgate's townhouse, where the three of them waited for word from LN. Gershon was watching the local television news when Weber appeared on the screen cutting the ribbon at the bank.

"Hey, get a load of this," he yelled.

They all crowded around the set. "So, that's where he was going," Southgate said.

"Look at that," Gershon said as the camera moved in for a close-up on the money. "Two million dollars."

Southgate stared at the currency. "Whata you know," he said.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*



## Chapter Thirty Eight

It was a few minutes before five o'clock when Margaret Jean opened the door a crack and peeked into Axelbank's office. She'd loosened her red hair so it fell gracefully on her shoulders. Her peach like skin was aglow.

Axelbank swung around in his high backed, leather judge's chair. "Hi," she purred in a husky voice. Axelbank smiled. "Come in, my dear."

Margaret Jean strode forward, leaving the door slightly ajar. She kissed him sweetly on the forehead, then blew on an ear lobe. She looked at him and smiled invitingly.

"I wasn't expecting this, my dear," he said.

Margaret Jean leaned over until her bosom brushed his cheek. He nuzzled her as his breathing quickened. She put her lips near his ear. "Let's go over to the couch," she whispered.

Arm in arm, they walked across the room. Margaret Jean kicked off her high heels and gently pushed Axelbank down. When he was stretched out on his back, she tenderly loosened his tie and smothered him with soft kisses.

As her hands worked their way down his body, Axelbank's eyelids dropped and a contented smile closed in on his face indicating a man prepared to savor a slow acceleration of desire. Margaret Jean glanced at her wristwatch. Five-thirteen. She looked towards the door. There was no sign of LN. My God, she thought, I hope I didn't begin too soon.

More slowly, she undid Axelbank's belt and opened his zipper. The door creaked. Margaret Jean turned to see LN remove her shoes and tiptoe in. One hand held a large magnifying glass and a pen light, the other a small pad of paper and a pencil. Reassured, Margaret Jean reached inside of Axelbank's pants and massaged him. He moaned happily, a sound reflective of his continued contentedness.

LN knelt beside the couch and put her supplies on the floor. She leaned down and kissed Axelbank. He stirred. "It's me, Alan, LN," she whispered, and kissed him again. He opened one eye long enough to see her face, then lapsed back into the ecstasy of his good fortune. Together, the two women fondled and caressed him. Blissful sighs punctuated his breathing. Margaret Jean winked at LN, then cuddled against Axelbank's chest to hold him down as she kissed him. She guided her hand to his organ, now firm and high.

LN slid down to pickup the magnifying glass and pen light, then, as Margaret Jean held him down and devoured him with kisses, LN moved in on the tattoo. With quick motility, she alternated between reading the tattoo, brightened by the pen light, with the magnifying glass and recording the numbers- 4E28.... 3R17....2L65...RO.

When the task was finished, she pushed everything under the couch and pulled a small can of finger nail polish remover from a pocket in her skirt. With a quick push of the button she sprayed the clear acetone liquid with its cooling effect on the skin of Axelbank's manhood. The organ drooped.

Axelbank startled, popped open his eyes. "What happened?"

LN snuggled up beside Margaret Jean and kissed his cheek. "You just withered." Margaret Jean slithered forward. "My poor dear," she said, soothing his forehead.

Axelbank blushed. "I'll be damned," he said and lifted his head to look. "Suddenly, it just felt cold." He ogled LN longingly. "This is embarrassing," he said. He zipped up his fly, fastened his belt and rose from the couch. "The only thing left to do is go home."

All three of them rode down in the elevator together. Outside, on the sidewalk, the women solicitously helped Axelbank into the back seat of his chauffeured limousine and watched as the car, with its FAN 1 license plate, faded into the distance. Then, they turned on their heels and re-entered the building. Back upstairs, they went directly to the wall safe in Axelbank's office. As LN read the numbers taken from the tattoo, Margaret Jean twisted the dial. She pulled and the safe opened. Numerous envelopes lay inside. One, brown and bulky, was labeled "medical records."

LN sifted through the documents. After a time, she handed some to Margaret Jean. "Can you Xerox these while I keep looking?" she asked. "Sure," Margaret Jean said, walking out through her own office toward the mailroom.

LN continued to search. Two smaller envelopes turned up, both with Elvis' name on them. One was dated March 10, 1964, the other December 4, 1976. Complete sets of dental X-rays were inside. LN slipped the 1976 envelope into her purse.

Margaret Jean returned and picked up a second batch of the documents to Xerox. LN finished while she was gone. So they copied the last bunch together.

LN gazed fondly at Margaret Jean. "I'm in your debt for this," she said.

Margaret Jean laughed. "It was worthwhile just to see the look on Alan's face when he collapsed." She paused, then became serious. "In a way my heart went out to him, though. I felt very warm towards him when we packed him to his car."

"Better be careful," LN said.

The women's cars were in the same garage. Margaret Jean pulled out, followed by LN. After several blocks they were separated by traffic. It was then that LN scouted out a pay phone and called Southgate. When she told him about the dental X-rays, he said, "I think we have our proof."

LN saw the first revelers of the Cotton Carnival as she drove home. Before the night was over, there'd be many more.

She hurried, several times risking traffic lights as they turned from green to red. It was that kind of trip. Every halt seemed an eternity and she tried to lessen them.

Giddy over her success, she ached to share it with the others immediately. They were equally anxious. Southgate watched her arrival from the doorway of his townhouse and he went to meet her as she parked her car.

He was all smiles. "Come inside. Let's have a look at those X-rays," he said. "Dental work is always being used to identify bodies. CBC ought to accept this for Elvis." He hugged her as she pulled the envelope from her purse and handed it to him. Grasping it, he said, "this is a real coup."

"These were made eight months before he died," LN said.

"That's close enough to take the chance."

They walked inside, where the X-rays were spread out on the dining room table. There were four in all covering different sections of Elvis' mouth. The conspirators crowded around, studying them close-up.

"Here are a couple of cavities," Togo said, pointing at one strip of film. "Filled, of course." He glanced at the other negatives. "Hey, not a bad set of teeth."

Southgate looked at his watch. The time was near to contact Jordan again. He poked Gershon. "We'd better get moving," he said, reaching for the frequency hopper.

"Why don't we all go," LN suggested.

Southgate hesitated. "You and Togo stay here and get ready for the ball," he said finally. "Gershon and I can handle the message alone."

"The ball," LN cried out, touching her hands to her cheeks. "I've got to wash my hair."

The men laughed. "We'll be back in about an hour," Southgate said as he and Gershon headed for the van. They traveled westward retracing the route LN had just driven. Soon, they could see the lights of the downtown skyscrapers.

Several blocks from the Peabody, the hands on Southgate's watch swept past eight o'clock. He raised the aerial of the frequency hopper and put his voice close to the microphone. "Are you there, Jordan?"

"Right here, Hound Dog, and waiting."

"Then listen carefully. I'll have a ~~delivery~~ for you later tonight. When it's in place, I'll call you back. Let's say sometime after eleven o'clock."

"You sure keep me on my toes, Hound Dog."

Southgate laughed. "This is just the beginning. Maybe you'd better get forty winks. I'm sure Mr. Wiley wouldn't want you to miss anything."

"If you've got a story, I'll get it," Jordan said heatedly. "Don't worry about me."

"Adios, then." Southgate shut off the hopper. The van was opposite the front entrance to the hotel now. Southgate and Gershon saw early arrivals to the ball on the sidewalk in their costumes and formal clothes.

"They must be going to dinner first," Southgate said.

"Yeah. The dancing doesn't start until ten," Gershon replied. He wheeled the van around the block and headed back east toward Southgate's home.

Two hours later, the four plotters were once more on their way. Togo rode with LN in her Triumph followed by Gershon and Southgate in the van. The men wore tuxedos. LN was stunning in a floor length, black lace strapless gown. A sheer, black wool stole covered her shoulders and in her hand she held a gold metallic evening bag and a black mask sprinkled with gold glitter. Inside the purse nestled a small envelope containing the all important X-rays.

When they arrived at the hotel, the surrounding streets bustled with the activity of partygoers. Everyone wore a mask now. LN drove her car into the hotel garage but the van was left on the street nearby, a blanket tossed over the frequency hopper. It was fifteen minutes after ten as Southgate and Gershon crossed the crowded lobby and ascended the carpeted stairs to the Continental ballroom on the mezzanine floor, where they were joined again by LN and Togo.

"What an elegant room," LN remarked as they entered. Ornate crystal chandeliers hung from the center of its high curved ceiling. Gilded wall sconces hung between arched windows and doors and the highly polished wooden dance floor glistened.

The strains of the orchestra playing "The Way We Were" floated through the air as the four reached their table. LN's eyes sought out Southgate. He noticed and lead her out among the dancers.

"I thought the song appropriate," she said.

"Very, for a couple of old consorts like ourselves." She raised her head to see the amusement in his eyes.

She squeezed his hand. "Brax, thanks for making it so easy for Togo and me."

"Mysterious are the ways of love, LN." He moved his lips closer to her ear. "Now, let's discuss the X-rays. Did you see the flowers on the tables in the hall outside?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Will one of the arrangements be the drop?"

"The second table to the right as you go out. Put the envelope under the vase. In twenty minutes, I'll duck out to the van. You and Togo get some air in the hall after I leave. When it's safe, put the envelope in its place. Gershon can report to me when it's ready and I'll signal Jordan for the pick-up."

"Should we leave when we've hidden the envelope?"



"Stick around. We want to be sure Jordan gets it."

They danced in silence after that. When the tune was over, they returned to their table and twenty minutes later, continuing to wear his mask, Southgate eased from the ballroom.

Outside, the air was still balmy as he hurried to the van. A glance at his watch told him it was a few minutes after eleven. Everything's relative, he thought, this night is still young. Southgate caught his breath as he waited for Gershon. Five minutes passed. Still cautious, he slumped in his seat and cuddled the hopper knowing that the gaiety of the carnival would excuse his behavior.

After another ten minutes, Gershon appeared. "We're ready," he whispered, leaning in the window.

"You rejoin LN and Togo in case something goes wrong. I can transmit alone."

Gershon stepped away from the van as Southgate raised the aerial and twisted his body inward. "Jordan are you ready?" he said in a low voice. "This is Hound Dog."

"I'm ready,"

"On the mezzanine floor of the hotel outside of the ballroom are several tables with floral arrangements. There's an envelope for you under the vase on the second table to the left as you get off the elevator."

"Gotcha."

"I'll call you when you're back in your room. We'll go on from there."

"O.K."

"Good luck." Southgate signed off. He secured the hopper and returned to the hotel.

Clay Granger and a CBC camera crew, as planned, had checked into the Peabody late that afternoon. Jordan now summoned them to meet him at the elevator. They rode down together to the mezzanine, anxious to film the pick-up.

Granger turned to the crew. "Shoot away on this one," he coached them. "We're making history. Take all the footage you want." The crew nodded and moments later stepped out into the glitter and merriment of the partygoers.

Jordan gasped at the sight. "My God, we couldn't script it better." He jumped back on the elevator. "Clay," he shouted. "Set the crew up to shoot me getting off and walking into the crowd." The elevator doors closed and Jordan rode up several floors. Then he went down again and strode off into the glare of TV lights and twirling camera sprockets.

The crew peddled backwards, Jordan took his bearings, then moved toward the designated table. The curious watched, one group in particular. Casually clustered near the ballroom door, drinks in hand, were Southgate and his co-conspirators.

At the table, Jordan bent over, as if to smell the flowers, then lifted the vase. He picked up the envelope as the camera zoomed in for a close-up, then walked away to the railing overlooking the balcony. There he looked at the wrapper and wondered what was inside. Suddenly, he laughed quietly. Surely, he was being watched. The carnival made it so easy with its masks.

Granger reached his side. "I'm going to make some shots of the ball."

Jordan turned around. "Do you suppose one of them is Hound Dog?"

"Who knows?" Granger shrugged. "Christ, it looks like a convention of Lone Rangers."

"I've got to get back to my room," Jordan said.

"We'll be up shortly," Granger replied.

As soon as the elevator doors closed on the famous anchorman, Southgate handed his drink to Togo and hurried back outside to the van. Up went the aerial on the hopper. "Jordan, are you there?"

"With your gift beside me."

"Does it need an explanation?"

"I wasn't born yesterday, Hound Dog."

"Are you satisfied?"

"I have a call in to Mr. Wiley. Look, it's going to take me several hours to unravel this."

"Two hours seems reasonable."

"All right. Get back to me in two hours."

Down went the aerial on Southgate's hopper. He slipped out of the van and returned to the ball.

Jordan had called Wiley through the network switchboard in New York City. Hopefully, the chairman would telephone him soon. The newscaster unfolded the paper with Weber's home phone number scribbled on it and dialed. He listened as the rings continued. Finally, there was a click and a man's voice asked, "can I help you?"

"This is Kyd Jordan of the Continental Broadcasting Corporation. I'm anxious to get in touch with Mr. Weber."

"Yes, Mr. Jordan. This is Joe Turney, one of his assistants. I have the night duty watch. He and Mrs. Weber are attending the opening ball of the Cotton Carnival at the Peabody hotel."

With an effort, Jordan calmed his excitement. "I'm at the Peabody. Can you reach him?"

"He has a beeper."

"I'm in suite 908."

"Yes, I have that information here. Just sit tight, Mr. Jordan."

"Thank you." Jordan replaced the receiver. Immediately, the phone rang. "Hello."

"Kyd, this is Paul Wiley."

"Mr. Wiley, Hound Dog has come up with X-rays of Elvis' dental work."

"Can you verify them?"

"The District Attorney General is on his way up to my room. I'm going to ask him to help me."

"If they match, We'll pay him the money. We want this story, Kyd. I'm counting on you to keep it going."

"Yes, sir. I have some good footage of the X-rays pick-up."

"Excellent."

There was a rap on the door. "Someone's here, Mr. Wiley."

The CBC chairman said, "keep me informed," and hung up. There was a second knock. "Coming," Jordan yelled.

It was Weber. He'd removed his mask. "This is convenient."

"Isn't it?" Jordan handed him the X-rays and gave him the details of the pick-up.

Weber squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. "I couldn't have been more than a couple of hundred feet away in the ballroom," he said, his feelings edgy. Then he became rigid in his chair, his eyes steely. "I'm going to whomp this Hound Dog." The law officer reached for the phone and dialed his night assistant. "Joe, run down Elvis' dentist and get back to me." He hung up and settled back.

A half an hour later, Weber was called back. "Presley's dentist was Dr. Willis Berry," he informed Jordan, replacing the phone. "He's out of town but his nurse will meet us at his office. A car is on the way for us."

"I'd like to bring my camera crew," Jordan said.

"By all means," Weber replied affably. "Do they have a car?"

"A rented one."

"Tell them to get it down in front of the hotel. They can follow us."

A ten minute ride took them to the dentist's office, where the nurse, a pert woman with flashing green eyes, named Betsy Jo Digger, arrived several minutes after them. Despite the hour, she was dressed neatly in her white uniform. She glanced admiringly at Kyd Jordan and a ready smile crossed her face as she unlocked the door.

She snapped on the lights and the assemblage, grown now to include Granger and the camera crew, crowded inside. Businesslike, Betsy Jo, went directly to the files and pulled the X-ray records of the late singing star. She studied the envelopes, then handed one to Weber. "These are the last ones Dr. Berry took. December 4, 1976."

"Can you read them?" Weber asked.

"Yes, I do quite a bit of that for Dr. Berry," Betsy Jo replied.

Jordan handed her the set he had. "Do these match?"

The nurse studied the two sets painstakingly. Minutes passed. The office was quiet as Weber and the television newsmen waited. Jordan looked at his watch. Twelve forty-five. Less than an hour before Hound Dog would contact him again.

"Well, Miss Digger?" Weber asked.

She motioned him away and continued her work. The tension built. Jordan and Weber exchanged glances. Finally, she faced them. "The teeth on these X-rays are the same. The dental work is identical." Her eyes locked on Jordan and she smiled again.

Granger spoke up. "Miss Digger could we get some film of you studying the X-rays?"

"Would this be for Mr. Jordan's show?"

Granger turned and rolled his eyes. "You betcha."

"All right."

Jordan interrupted. "Clay, I have to get back and talk to Mr. Wiley."

"You go ahead," the producer of the CBC Nightly News said. "We've got a car."

Jordan turned to Weber. "O.K. with you?"

Weber nodded.

Back in his room, Jordan placed a call to New York City. This time, Wiley was on the line almost immediately. to hear Jordan tell him that the X-rays were authentic.

"All right. Arrange to pay Hound Dog the two million so we can get on with the auction. I want that auction as soon as possible." Wiley took a deep breath. "By that time, the other networks won't have a viewer left."

"When should we break the story?" Jordan asked.

"I'll leave that up to you."

The eternal trap, Jordan thought. He'll come in on success, but the margin for error is left to me.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*



## Chapter Thirty Nine

The frequency hopper crackled and once more the newscaster heard the familiar question, "Jordan, are you there?"

"Here, Hound Dog, and ready to deliver your money."

"Hey, that's good news. When?"

"Just give the word."

"Later today. Bring the money down from New York on one of your corporate jets. Arrange for a courier. When the time comes, I'll instruct him where to go."

Weber listened next to Jordan. Impulsively, without warning, he spoke. "This is the district attorney general. You'll never get away with this." For a moment, there was silence. Jordan stared at Weber, stunned by his capriciousness.

"Well, you have company," Hound Dog put in. He laughed sardonically.

"Are you surprised?" Jordan asked.

"He'll heighten the chase."

"A chase that will soon be over, Hound Dog," Weber shouted.

"That remains to be seen," Hound Dog replied. "Meanwhile, your courier will need a hopper of his own. It's in locker 27 at the bus depot. The baggage master has the key."

The sound on Jordan's hopper went dead. He turned to Weber. "I've got to call New York. That's a lot of money to get together in a few hours, even for CBC."

Weber moved toward the door. "I'm going to catch a few hours sleep," he said. "I'll be back in touch after that." He stifled a nervous yawn.

As soon as the law officer departed, Jordan relayed Hound Dog's instructions to Wiley in New York and found him concerned about providing the courier.

"I'll call a bonded messenger service right here in Memphis," Jordan volunteered.

"No, that's too public," the network chairman replied emphatically. "It could blow our secrecy and in the process our exclusive story before we ever get in on the air. We need someone more private."

"I'm afraid I've no more suggestions, sir," the newscaster replied in a subdued voice.

After a moment of silence, Wiley said, "For years a Father Morrison has been a friend of mine. He's at Our Lady of Angels parish in Memphis now but I knew him first here in New York. I've sponsored a good many of his youth activities. He's a unique priest, rides a motorcycle and serves as chaplain to cycle clubs."

401a

"Would he help us?" asked Jordan.

"I'll give him a call. He'll laugh but for me he might. He knows I'll give to the church in return."

"The two million dollars would be safe with him," Jordan said.

"Yes, we have to think of that, too."

"You'll contact him, then."

"He's an early riser. I'll call him in a few hours and get back to you."

"I'll be anxious to know his answer," Jordan said. The conversation completed, Jordan hung up and soon was asleep.

At dawn, Weber stood beside the gravesite at Graceland and listened to the wind. The air was chilly and in the distance a thin mist hugged the back meadow beyond the muted mansion. A few feet away, his uncle Tim paced restlessly as a small hoist lifted the bronze and granite marker from the grave.

Weber stepped forward, his face pale. Warily, he peered into the shadowy vault and saw the top of the copper casket.

"I told you everything here is normal," his uncle said. "If anything was askew, I'd be the first to know about it as chief of security."

Weber shivered and pulled his coat collar around his neck. He listened patiently while his uncle suggested that the marker be put back in place. "I have to know for sure," Weber said finally. He pulled a court order from his pocket and handed it to his uncle. "This will protect you. Have the casket raised. I'll alert the coroner that we're coming in."

"What'll I tell the tourists?" the uncle inquired.

Weber blanched. "Nothing, for God's sake. When we're gone put the marker back. They'll never know the difference." His nostrils were rigid. "Listen, Uncle Tim, no one is to know about this. If there's to be an announcement, I'll make it."

The relative, red faced, nodded.

"If things are as normal as you claim, I'll be back here again after dark with the coffin," Weber concluded. He turned on his heels and walked to his car.

Paul Wiley's recruitment of Father Morrison, as predicted, was successful but even the television executive had difficulty rounding up two million dollars in cash on a Saturday morning. Only his power and friendships in high places made it possible. Still, it was midday before the armored Brinks truck with the money pulled up along side a CBC corporate jet at Newark airport for the flight south. In its wake, executives of several of Manhattan's most prestigious banks were taking unaccustomed naps as a result of being roused out of their beds in the early morning darkness. But then, Paul Wiley, in his climb to the top, had never kept banker's hours. And, as a final touch, the old man himself flashed the word to Jordan when the plane took off.

As soon as Wiley had informed Jordan that Father Morrison would be the courier, the newscaster picked up the frequency hopper at the bus depot for the priest to use. Then, he returned to his hotel room, where he waited impatiently for further instructions from Hound Dog.

His telephone rang shortly before one o'clock. It was Weber. His voice was shaky. "I've verification for you beyond the dental work," he said. "The casket in Elvis' vault contained the bones of a middle aged woman."

Jordan was dumbfounded. "I expected the grave to be empty."

"Empty or not, our beloved Elvis wasn't there."

Jordan moved cat quick. "Who knows about this?"

"So far, only me, you and the coroner." Weber punctuated his conversation with tremulous, restless laughs. "And Hound Dog, of course." Then, like a sailboat, he was on a new tack. "This is the work of master criminal."

Jordan's body was wet with perspiration. He feared the worst. "We've got to keep this bottled up until the network's six o'clock news," he said, a threat in his voice. "I'll break the story then."

"What about the money for Hound Dog?"

"The newscast comes first." Jordan paused, thinking. "Why don't you take my frequency hopper?" he said finally. "Our courier will be Father Morrison of Our Lady of Angels. You could monitor Hound Dog's directions to him."

"When is the plane due?"

"That's the conflict. The plane will get here just when I'm busiest preparing the newscast."

"When did you last talk to Hound Dog?"

"Hours ago."

"I'll be right over to get the hopper."

Several blocks from the hotel, Southgate and LN strolled in the assembly area for the Grand Parade of the Cotton Carnival that was to begin at dusk followed by the exclusive dinner dances and parties the krewes would hold in plush private clubs and hotels.

For a time, the couple watched students work feverishly to put the final touches on the Delta college float bedecked in red carnations and white crepe paper roses. Beside them, a band unloaded from a bus to take its place shortly in the line of march. Nearby was the float of the Secret Society of Boll Weevils of which Weber was the Grand Bug. Drifting beside it, a few feet in the air above the back of an old army Jeep to which it was attached, was a helium filled balloon cut in the likeness of the district attorney general's face. Stamped on the sides were the words "Weber for Governor."

"I guess you'd call that a trial balloon," Southgate said, trying to suppress a smile.

"Oh, Brax, that's awful," LN retorted, but then she laughed, too.

The pair walked toward the balloon. Other workers, busy with their own chores, paid no attention to them. Southgate bent over and inspected the gondola. He noted slits cut in the bottom of the basket to allow doubloons to slip through. Nine different doubloons had been designed for the carnival—one for each krewe plus the king and queen. The Boll Weevils would fill the gondola with their discs and as the balloon sailed along above the parade, the fake coins would drop through the holes for the crowds to catch as souvenirs.

"Pretty clever," Southgate said. "Suppose that's Weber's idea?" LN shrugged. As he talked, Southgate slipped a beeper snugly into one corner of the gondola. "That ought to do it," he whispered. LN took his arm and they ambled away.

At that moment, in his courthouse office overlooking the parade assembly area, Weber marshaled local law officials. He looked tired and strained. He seemed to have grown older since last night and there were lines of sleeplessness around his eyes.

"It seems to me this Hound Dog can't have it both ways," he declared. "Either he passes up the money or we capture him." All around him, heads nodded dutifully.

"What does he look like, Van?" asked the Memphis police chief, Stewart Peake, who stood erect in a navy blue uniform beside the district attorney general's desk.

Weber shook his head. "No one's ever seen him," he said.

"Then, who do we look for?" the chief asked.

"I hope the courier will lead us to him. Meantime, I can only suggest that your men keep their eyes open for any unusual behavior."

"At carnival time there's hardly anything else," someone said. The others laughed. Even Weber smiled wryly.

"Any clues at all?" asked the Shelby county sheriff, Will Tucker, a sort of Brunswick stew of a man in rumpled, mismatched clothes.

"I've heard his voice but...."

The sheriff, his body overflowing a chair in front of Weber, interrupted. "Do you have a voice print?"

Weber twisted his chair around and gazed out of the window at the floats. His eyes, in fusty conceit, rested for a few seconds on his balloon. "Hound Dog's voice was obviously distorted," he said at length. "He uses what's called a frequency hopper. That's a radio which constantly changes channels to avoid detection. In addition, there was a warble to his voice." Then, as though he were an expert, he repeated Jordan's explanation of this, a smug smile on his face. "I suspect he used a variable delay circuit in his frequency hopper to create the warble."

"He seems well prepared," the chief said.

"And calm," said the sheriff. "He must think he can get away with it." With a sense of realism, he added, "I don't think he'll turn back now."

Weber looked pained. There seemed to be a certain sense of admiration in the room for Hound Dog.

"How'd the old woman's bones get in the grave, Van?" the sheriff inquired.

"There's only one way," Weber replied promptly. "There was an exchange of coffins when Elvis was moved from Forest Hill cemetery's Midtown mausoleum to Graceland."



"That was several years ago," the police chief reminded him.

Weber stood firm. "None-the-less, I've begun to round up everyone involved. It seems plausible that the lapse of time has been on purpose to make it harder for us to conduct an investigation."

"If he's as patient to pick up his money, you won't have to run for governor, Van," the sheriff remarked. "You'll have a lifetime job right here." Again, light hearted laughter filled the room.

"Anything else, Van," the police chief asked. "I've got a lot of men to deploy."

"Presently, ~~that's~~ it," Weber said. "I'll wait for Hound Dog to radio in."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Forty

Father Morrison roared up to the Peabody on his motorcycle, a white scarf tied loosely around his clerical collar. A small, painted, black cross decorated the front of his glossy white, hard plastic safety helmet.

Jordan waited on the sidewalk. The priest was a stocky man in his early forties with a seamed face framing ever twinkling blue eyes. A smile broke across his wide, generous mouth. "Ah, Mr. Jordan," he said, "'Tis an honor to meet you."

The newscaster smiled. "And the same for me, Father," he replied. Short of time, Jordan handed the cleric the frequency hopper, quickly explained its operation and filled him in on Weber and other details. "I'm sorry to be in such a rush, Father," Jordan apologized, "but I've got to work on my broadcast."

"Be on your way, then," the priest laughed, pressing down on his cycle's starter. "I'll pull down a few blocks and wait for my orders." He gave the motor the gas and sped away.

The wheels of the CBC corporate jet carrying the two million dollars touched down on the runway at Memphis International Airport at four twenty-three that afternoon. Minutes later the plane rolled to a stop near the general aviation terminal to await further instructions.

Southgate, meanwhile, had left LN alone in the parade assembly area and walked several blocks by himself to an isolated sidestreet where Gershon's van was parked. Once inside, he quickly put up the aerail of his own frequency hopper.

"Hound Dog calling the CBC courier," he said.

"'Tis the courier, himself, here," Father Morrison replied.

"I want you to ride south on Interstate 55 toward the airport," instructed Southgate.

Weber, waiting in an unmarked police car outside the courthouse, listened on the frequency hopper given to him by Jordan. "This is it," he told his driver. Almost simultaneously, the white helmeted priest, Weber and Southgate pulled out into traffic from their different locations. "Hurry," Weber said.

In minutes, Weber was on the same freeway as Father Morrison. Southgate, however, headed a mile and a half east to the parallel route, Interstate 40-240, then south.

The priest maneuvered his motorcycle in and out among the automobiles. Strapped to the rack on his rear fender was the metal box for the money. He rounded the big curve in the road north of Nonconnah creek. The sun was to his back now.

A half minute later, Weber passed the same turn.

In the van, Southgate lifted his hopper off the empty seat next to him as he passed the golf course in Pine Hill park. The interchange of 40-240 and 55 was three-fourths of a mile ahead of him.

"Hound Dog to courier, Come in if you read me."

"I read you," Father Morrison answered.

"At the airport go to the general aviation terminal. You'll find a jet there that belongs to Continental Broadcasting Corporation. It's been on the ground about forty minutes."

"Roger."

Weber turned to his driver. "He sure doesn't tell us anything we don't already know."

Father Morrison sped through the interchange, Weber still thirty seconds behind him. Two minutes later he turned into the airport connection road and headed toward the general aviation terminal. Southgate continued on south to Brooks road, then turned east toward the airport, where he pulled into an isolated area of the hotel parking lot in sight of the main terminal.

"Hound Dog to courier."

"Read you."

"When you get to the CBC jet take the contents of the package they give you, then call me."

"Roger."

"That's the money," Weber excitedly told his driver.

Southgate sat back in the van to wait. Weber pulled up outside of the general aviation terminal, where he saw Father Morrison's motorcycle. The police radio band in his car crackled with chatter. By now police were stationed around the airport and along the roads going back into town ready to arrest Southgate if he took the money from the courier. Circling above them was a spotter in a Piper Cub.

Weber listened for a few moments, then turned to his driver again. "Hound Dog will never get out of this dragnet." Then, like a shark that exists on impulse and instinct, he picked up the frequency hopper beside him.

"Hound Dog, this is District Attorney Weber. In forty-five minutes, Kyd Jordan will tell the world Elvis' is missing. You still have time to back off. There's no way you can pick up that money without us knowing it. So, why continue? Give Elvis back to us."

Southgate was startled, then realized that Weber, as before, was talking over Kyd Jordan's hopper. It was an unexpected development. He hadn't expected Jordan to work so closely with Weber. Still, he chuckled quietly to himself. "Now that remains to be seen about the money," he shot back at his old foe. "As for Elvis, he's safe in my hands."

Father Morrison was at the plane. After a brief discussion with a CBC executive at the foot of the ramp, he handed him the frequency hopper. "Hound Dog, are you there," the executive asked.

"Here."

"This is Dwight Hensley, Mr. Wiley's assistant, I just want to make sure this is your courier."

"He is. I would like the money transferred to the box he has with him."

"All right. It'll take just a few minutes."

Hensley handed the frequency hopper back to the priest and motioned him aboard. There, the CBC official opened a large, brown leather briefcase in which one hundred dollar bills were stacked in packs of \$10,000 each. Methodically, he began to place the bills in the box, one foot square and one foot high.

The priest watched fascinated, at first skeptical then confident that all of the money would fit. Each bill was only .0045 inches thick. One thousand of them reached only four and a half inches high. The weight of each one was only one-thirtieth of an ounce.

"A tight little package," Hensley said when he finished.

Father Morrison laughed. "But very valuable." He snapped on the frequency hopper. "Hound Dog, I have the money. What next?"

"Leave the airport and get back on the freeway. When you get to the interchange of 40-240 and 55 let me know."

The priest left the plane, a tight grip on the money box. When he reached his motorcycle, Weber intercepted him. "Father, just a minute. I'd like to check that since we'll be riding shotgun for you," he said, identifying himself.

Obligingly, the priest opened the box and Weber inspected several stacks of bills. As he did so, he unobtrusively slipped a beeper among them. "All right, Father," he said. "Take them away." Earlier in the day, Weber has asked to board the plane to mark the money but the network had refused him permission, saying he was interrupting a private business transaction. Its payment for the story was not a crime, CBC told him, and he would have to track Hound Dog some other way.

Weber watched the priest mount his motorcycle and roar away. "I can be just as cagey as Hound Dog," he told his driver as he climbed into his car. "Follow him."

The priest traveled down the highway into the setting sun, the box strapped to his vehicle. He neared the interchange, Weber several hundred feet behind him and the Piper Cub circling overhead. "Hound Dog, I'm just east of the mixing bowl. Which way do I go?"

"Take 40-240 north."

"Roger."

Weber turned to his driver, perplexed. "What the hell is going on. I never expected him to go back into town." He picked up the microphone to the police radio. "Chief Peake, this is Weber."

"Come in, Van."

"The courier just turned north in 40-240. What do you make of that?"

"This Hound Dog is a bold one. He's challenging all of us."

Father Morrison sped along. Soon, the downtown skyline was in view and still nothing had happened. Several miles behind him, Southgate kept pace with the traffic in the van.

Kyd Jordan stood in front of the music gate, microphone in hand. Clay Granger stood a few feet in front of him on the sidewalk, earphones on and holding a clipboard. Behind him, early evening traffic moved briskly along highway 51.

Granger raised a finger and pointed at the newscaster to signal he was on the air. Jordan looked into the camera and began to talk:

"The body of Elvis Presley, world famous singer of the '60s, has disappeared from his tomb here at Graceland, his family home, in this city.

"Van Weber, Shelby county district attorney general, ordered Mr. Presley's grave opened at seven-thirty this morning. James Miller, Shelby county coroner, reported that the nine hundred pound casket contained the remains of a middle aged woman.

"This almost unbelievable episode began four days ago when a man, calling himself "Hound Dog," contacted Continental Broadcasting Corporation offices in New York City. During a series of talks over an electronic device known as a frequency hopper, "Hound Dog" disclosed that Mr. Presley's body had been "borrowed" as he put it. Authorities were notified immediately. It wasn't until last night, however, that CBC received proof of the abduction from "Hound Dog." That proof was X-ray plates which matched the late singer's dental work. Where Mr. Presley's body is, and how the woman's remains were placed in the casket, only "Hound Dog" knows at the moment.



"CBC is working closely with Attorney General Weber and other local officials. No one at CBC, or here, has knowingly seen Hound Dog, however. Despite the lack of leads, Mr. Weber, who's thinking of running for governor, is confident he'll break the case. Meanwhile, stay tuned to CBC stations for further bulletins."

Jordan stood quietly. Granger walked forward. "Good show," he said.

Interstate 40 splits from 240 east of downtown Memphis and goes west across the Mississippi river into Arkansas. When he saw the interchange, Father Morrison took the initiative. "Hound Dog, the junction of 240 with 40 is ahead."

"Already? You're traveling fast." There was a short pause, then Hound Dog was back. "Take 40. Your next stop is the parade assembly area in front of the courthouse. Peel off of 40 anywhere you like to get there." Hound Dog paused again, then asked, "Weber, you still around?"

"You can't lose me, Hound Dog."

Weber picked up his police radio microphone and called in the Piper Cub. "Can you hear the beeper?" he asked.

"Roger."

The priest sped on. Weber's car was right behind him now, a portable flashing red light attached to its roof. At Danny Thomas boulevard, Father Morrison left the interchange and began to weave his way through crowded downtown streets. Gradually, his pace slowed until he moved at a crawl into the bustle of the parade assembly area. Marshals shouted orders. Several bands were tuning up.

The frequency hopper crackled. "I'm here Hound Dog," the priest volunteered.

"Find Charley Jones," Hound Dog instructed. "He'll be at the Boll Weevils float."

Weber gave his car's siren a short blast. Father Morrison craned his neck and saw the district attorney general motion him on. A few seconds later, Weber pointed to a man. The courier stopped his motorcycle. "Are you Charley Jones?"

"I am."

The courier spoke into his frequency hopper. "I have Mr. Jones, Hound Dog." Weber was at his side now. Hound Dog's voice said, "Mr. Jones, my courier has two million dollars I'd like taken to your bank."

The bank executive looked at Weber. "What's this?" he asked his close friend in whispered tones. In twenty minutes the parade was to begin. Weber pulled him aside. Their conversation was short and animated. When it was over, Weber gestured the courier on. He and Jones followed in the car. At the bank, they were met by Kyd Jordan, his broadcast over. The newscaster took the frequency hopper from Weber. "Your story is out, Hound Dog."

Dusk was near. Soon, the searchlights would play their beams on the night sky. The traditional torches to lead the parade were lighted. Father Morrison, Jones, Weber and Jordan huddled around the motorcycle in front of the bank.

Hound Dog spoke. "Listen carefully," he said. "I want the two million dollars which the courier has traded for the money on display in the bank lobby. When Weber's balloon passes by in the parade put the box inside its gondola."

Weber shook his head back and forth vehemently. Jordan cut him short. "Mr. Jones, it can't make any difference if its CBC's two million dollars in that display." Jones nodded. Jordan continued. "This is a business transaction as far as the network is concerned. CBC owes Hound Dog that money for the Presley story. I want it paid his way." To the newscaster, Hound Dog's latest move was an exquisite detail. He admired it.

Weber began to object again. The irony of his situation filled him with embarrassment. He realized he looked the fool. The display he'd spawned had been turned against him. But already, Jones, who'd begun to enjoy the joke on his friend, and Jordan were inside the bank trailed by the CBC camera crew. In a few minutes, they emerged with the substitute money. Down the street, the parade approached. The helium filled likeness of Weber floated lazily above, doubloons filtering from its basket onto the celebrants below.

When the balloon reached the bank, the Jeep to which it was attached was ordered from the line of march to the curb. The balloon was lowered and the money laid atop the doubloons. The crowd, believing it was a re-supply of souvenirs, cheered. The balloon tugged at its rope tied to the Jeep, then lifted skyward again. The frequency hopper crackled. All eyes turned toward it and waited. The few seconds seemed like an eternity until Hound Dog's voice, strong and authoritative, ordered, "Cut the balloon loose."

"No," Weber screamed. But Jordan rushed to the Jeep and untied the rope. With a surge of freedom, the balloon, traced by the TV cameras, rose majestically skyward through layers of increasing light until it burst into the last rays of the day's sun high above the downtown skyscrapers.

The crowd exploded into applause at the sight. Weber ran to the police car a few feet away and grabbed the microphone to the police radio and called to the Piper Cub overhead, "Follow that balloon. The money is in it."

Moments passed. Back from the plane over the police radio to Weber came a reassuring voice. "We can hear the beeper. Everything is under control."

"Damn it! Nothing is under control," Weber snapped back. "The beeper you hear is with the New York money in the bank lobby. Two million dollars in other money is escaping in that balloon. Now, just use your eyes and follow that damn balloon."

There was an awkward silence. Finally, the plane responded. "Yes, sir," the voice said meekly. "Roger."

The parade passed on. For a long minute, Weber scanned the rapidly darkening sky, then reluctantly turned to Jones. "Well, Charley, let's go inside. I'll get your list of serial numbers on those bills."

Jones' shoulders slumped. "That was vault money, Van. Some of it was old, some it new. I'd called it in from our branches over several weeks. I have no serial numbers."

"And the money now inside?" Weber asked.

"That's all brand new. The banks from which those bills came have their numbers. You could have traced them as they were spent." Jones sighed. "Hound Dog is a devilishly clever fellow."

Dejectedly, Weber stared at his friend, his depression fueled further by the fact that high above him his own likeness drifted carefreely in the air currents with the money he'd hoped to use for entrapment and by the realization that CBC was being extremely selective in fulfilling its promise of cooperation.

The Cessna 206 with Togo and Gershon aboard circled in the sky over Memphis, the glow of the city's lights reflected on its wing. Below them and off to the north, the Piper Cub operated by the police still maneuvered in a tight circle above the bank building.

In the Cessna cockpit, the dimmed dashboard the only light, a steady beep sounded on the radio directional finder from the transmitter Southgate had planted on the balloon. Togo, a licensed pilot for many years, banked the aircraft to follow the sound. The beep became louder.

417a

"It's drifting south along the river," Gershon said, wedged into the seat beside his friend. He pressed his face to the window, scanning the heavens for the air filled likeness of Weber. A minute passed. "There it is, below us to the west," Gershon shouted.

Togo took their plane in closer until the balloon was like a giant silver ball beside them silently stealing its way through space. The gondola hung underneath, stable and firm. The mooring rope trailed slightly behind, its loose end cracking like a whip.

For several minutes, they tracked the balloon calculating its speed and drift, then Gershon slipped from his seat and moved toward a rope that was loosely coiled on the floor in the back of the cabin and had half a dozen large grappling hooks several feet apart attached to it. A rifle lay on a seat nearby. Togo banked the plane and flew in a wide circle, ready to pilot the aircraft back in behind the balloon when Gershon was ready.

Meanwhile, on the ground, Weber returned to the police car outside of the bank. Rigid in the front seat, he flipped the switch on the microphone of the police radio.

"Weber here," he said, calling the Piper Cub. "Where's the balloon?"

"We don't know, sir," replied the pilot. "We've been unable to locate it without your beeper in the money."

"Well, look, damn it," Weber snarled.

417b

"It's dark out there, sir," the pilot said. "It makes a visual sighting difficult. There's a lot of sky up here. Without your beeper its like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"I can't control the sunset," Weber shouted back in frustration. "I'm sorry there's no daylight left. But, find it."

"Yes, sir," the pilot replied. "We'll do our best."

The drift of the Cessna carrying Togo and Gershon was steadily southward, where, an hour earlier, they had taken off from a small airfield a mile across the Shelby county line in northern Mississippi, a location carefully chosen because it was outside Weber's legal jurisdiction and because Togo, as a pilot, knew the owner always closed down to take his family to the Cotton Carnival's Grand Parade.

The conspirators had debated whether to rent the plane, or, as Southgate suggested, "borrow it." Togo and Gershon had argued for the former posing as a writer-photographer team covering the parade but Southgate had prevailed, insisting they couldn't expose themselves to possible identification later by being seen at an airport.

417c

The mechanically adept Togo had made it easy to "borrow" the plane. After he and Gershon had parked their car in a clump of woods and hiked a quarter of a mile to the airfield, he'd entered the cockpit, switched on a gas tank and advanced the throttle. Then, he'd slipped outside again, where, with a mere quarter turn of a screwdriver, he'd released the cowlings, lifted it and reached inside to break the magneto wire in half. The latter, he told Gershon, removed the ground and made it possible to start the engine. After a quick pre-flight inspection of the aircraft and a temporary alteration of its markings, he'd turned the propeller by hand to kick-on the single engine.

Togo now maneuvered the plane above and behind the balloon and slowed its speed. Gershon anchored the rope around the seat closest to the door, which he forced open against the wind. Bracing himself, he leaned forward and dropped out the rope with the grappling hooks. The distance to the balloon narrowed. Togo navigated downward and slightly to the right.

"Steady....steady....steady," Gershon shouted, pronouncing each word slowly as he dangled the rope to snag the balloon in mid-air. "Steady. Steady." Suddenly, the rope became taut in his hand, the slack gone. "It's hooked. It's hooked," he cried out jubilantly.



Togo increased his speed slightly as he felt the drag. Gershon picked up the rifle and fired a single shot to puncture the balloon. As it deflated, the drag reduced, making the handling more managable. Carefully, without haste, Gershon pulled the balloon upward until he could reach inside the gondola and lift the money box into the plane. Quickly, he untied the rope anchored to the seat. The balloon, its helium gone, plunged downward into the darkness below. Togo revved the engine and climbed several hundred feet, went into a wide turn and headed back over the parade route. There, far below them, he and Gershon saw the floats and bands moving along like a toy train.

Gershon patted the money box, a taste of victory in his mouth. He laughed, an infectious laugh, above the roar of the plane. Togo caught the spirit and joined him.

Weber, glancing upward from the sidewalk, saw the wing lights on the conspirators' plane. Mistaking it for the police Piper Cub, he scrambled back inside of the police car and grabbed the radio mike. "I see you overhead again," he told the pilot of the Piper Cub. "What can you report on the balloon?"

The pilot hesitated. "Overhead? Where?" he asked finally.

"The parade route."

"That's not me, sir. I'm east of the city."

"But, I can see your wing lights."

"There must be another small plane in the area." A moment of silence.

"About the balloon, sir. I'm afraid it's gotten away."

\*\*\*\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Forty One

It was twenty minutes to midnight before the excited conspirators, their faces flushed with victory, gathered in Southgate's townhouse. Togo and Gershon had first returned the light plane to the airfield in Mississippi and left five hundred dollars in the cockpit with the note, "a token of appreciation for the use of your Cessna."

Now, the money box rested in solitary splendor in the middle of the dining room table, lid open. Dozens of green one hundred dollar bills spilled over the side. Southgate pulled up a chair. The others sat down near him, their eyes eager in anticipation.

Southgate's face split into a wide grin as he gestured toward the prize. "Well, it's home," he said. His arms swept around the table. "And we're all safely back together."

"Here, here," Gershon shouted.

Togo reached out and tumbled several dozen bills through his fingers. "What a sight," he exclaimed. None of them had ever been that close to so much money before. Even LN, until tonight wealthier than the rest, was awed.

With their loot, as with everything else, the conspirators had been meticulous in their plotting and planning, leaving nothing to chance. In separate talks with each other while riding in the van or at other odd moments and finally all together after they'd conceived the sound-a-like contest the night the tunnel was finished, they'd voted Southgate two shares, since the idea was his originally, and the others one.

There'd almost been an argument that time, when, at first, Southgate had resisted their decision. "There's no need to single me out," he'd insisted. "Just remember, if we get caught, and we could be, it's just not me, it's all of you, too." He'd gestured to Togo and asked, "Where would I be without your mechanical genius?" Then, he'd turned to LN, "and your seed money and disguises?" Then, to Gershon, "and your strength?"

Togo had responded with some urgency. "Strictly speaking, we don't have to give you more," he replied. "In fact, the three of us, sticking together, could vote you a lesser share." For a moment he paused. "The point is, Brax, we can always outvote you. We've got you locked in."

Even Southgate had laughed, pleased as much at the recognition as the extra money. But, there'd been an added, even more important, dividend for him. The episode had put his mind at ease over any possibility of mistrust or greed growing among them as their bounty swelled. All four were long and loyal friends. None-the-less, he'd worried until that night that one or the other of them would stray from the fold in face of wealth and notoriety.

Now, they sat around the table, the clock hands on the stroke of midnight, ready to turn the tale of Cinderella upside down. Instead of reverting to rags and ashes; they were on their way to becoming millionaires. Southgate reached into the box and began counting out his share. He motioned to the others to do the same.

"We'll even up at the end if anyone comes up short," he said.

Hands reached in and out of the box. The rustle of money dominated the table as the arithmetic of the counting absorbed each of the conspirators. Steadily, the level of the bills in the box lowered. Togo stopped counting first.

"There're no one dollar bills," he announced.

Southgate laughed. "I forgot to ask for them." He eyed the pile of money in front of his companion. "How much do you have there?" he asked.

"Four hundred and forty four thousand and five hundred dollars. I'm fifty six dollars over my share."

"The others had by now stopped counting, too, and were listening intently. Southgate leaned back. "You're all going to be fifty six dollars over," he said, his eyes darting around the table. "I'll be one hundred and sixty six dollars short, in turn."

"The Huddle is open all night," Gershon volunteered. "Maybe we could get change there."

L21a

Southgate laughed again. "Unless I'm outvoted this time, too, I'm satisfied."

The others exchanged glances. "Well, with this much money, one hundred and sixty six dollars doesn't seem like much," Togo said.

So, it was settled and the counting continued until all the money in the box was gone and Southgate sat with six hundred and sixty six thousand five hundred dollars in front of him and the others with four hundred and forty four thousand five hundred.

"Now to find a large shoebox," Togo said.

"How about a trip to Las Vegas?" Gershon quipped, the grin of the Cheshire cat on his face. "Or a month or two in the Bahamas next winter?"

"Las Vegas sounds relaxing," LN joked.

Southgate's eyes swept around the table. "How you spend the money is your business," he said. "You have random, unmarked bills in front of you. There's no way they can be traced. Your vulnerability lies in spending too much, too soon, dropping a big wad somewhere that would arouse suspicion because it signaled too abrupt a change in your lifestyle. Only over the longhaul would I advise you spend freely."

"Even professors can invest widely, eh?" Togo said, slyly raising an eyebrow.

"For sure," Southgate responded, his voice strong with confidence.

421b

"What are you going to do with your share right now? asked Gershon looking directly at Southgate.

"I'm putting mine in a safety deposit box," Southgate replied.  
"I'll withdraw it slowly to invest. I'll have my fun and do my thing on the interest and dividends or what have you."

The others nodded.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Forty Two

For Weber, it was back to square one. He'd been called at home just after dawn on Sunday when the balloon was found by weekend hikers along the Mississippi river in far southwestern Memphis. When he reached the site, his likeness lay crumpled in a heap covered by spring dew, a bullet hole near the top and gashes in the sides made by the grappling hooks.

By just fifteen feet, the balloon had missed falling into the water and being swept away by the current. Weber wished desperately it had been. Now it only served to remind him of the agony and futility of his chase after Hound Dog the night before.

"There wasn't any money here at all?" he asked incredulously.

"We've questioned all the hikers, sir. They saw none. Even the dubloons were gone."

Weber cringed and turned his attention to the bullet hole and the punctures in the balloon. "Looks like I've been shot and knifed."

"We think they grabbed it in midair with hooks from a small plane, shot a hole in it, took the money box, then let the deflated balloon drop while they flew away. There's no other explanation."

Weber's face was white and hard as stone. He noticed the investigators were standing away from him, moodily, with a kind of fatalism. Again he was struck by Hound Dog's effrontery and assurance and he no longer counted on him making too many errors.

Overnight, Weber's confidence in his ability to catch his quarry had suffered a setback. His eyes made one last sweep of the area. "Bring it into the lab," he ordered, pointing to the balloon. Nervously, he climbed into the back seat of his official, chauffeured car and it sped away.

The phone rang in Kyd Jordan's darkened suite at eight o'clock. Sleepily, he lifted the receiver from its cradle, which rested on a French provincial bedside table. "Yes?" he mumbled.

"Jordan? Wiley here." The newscaster shot upright from his king sized pillow and listened intently. "Great work. The ratings overnight have us clobbering the competition."

"Thank you, sir."

Jordan's initial broadcast had set off a scramble by the other networks to catch up. But at eleven o'clock that night Jordan had moved even farther ahead of them with his exclusive films of the X-rays drop and Weber's middle of the night visit to the dentist's office.

"I'm ordering a thousand dollar bonus for you," Wiley said.

"Thank you again." The newscaster smiled at his good fortune.

"Now. How about the auction? What have you done about that?"



There was a long silence. Jordan wondered whether the CBC chairman ever expected him to sleep. He hadn't had dinner until midnight. Then he showered to relax his tired muscles before climbing in under his blanket.

"Jordan?" Wiley croaked, "Are you still there?"

"I've had no instructions yet from Hound Dog," Jordan replied lamely.

"Hound Dog be damned," the CBC chairman roared. "This is our show now. No more tail wagging the dog. The boys up here are working on the sound-a-like contest. We'll announce it today."

"But if he balks. Or worse, disappears."

"Don't worry. He's no doubt just a late sleeper like you. Meanwhile, I want you ready to disclose the auction on our Sunday 'Issues and the Nation' program. I've already ordered Secretary of State Paige scrubbed. I want Weber and Hound Dog live from Memphis. The first promo is already on the air."

Jordan blinked. "That's a tall order."

"Rubbish. Weber's a politician isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Wants to be governor doesn't he?"

"Yes. I was thinking more of Hound Dog."

"He wants to sell his time to the highest bidder, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"What better way than to advertise. If he hesitates, you call me."

"O.K.," Jordan said the word with vigor. He was out of bed and using one hand to pull on his white cotton shorts while he held the phone with the other. "Anything else?"

"No," Wiley answered. Jordan heard a crafty laugh, then the television executive's voice again. "We've got the world by the balls this morning."

Jordan shaved hurriedly, then remembered to make a wake-up call to Clay Granger. He dressed in his dove-gray suit with a silk shirt and knitted tie. To his amazement, Granger was already in the coffee shop.

"What the hell," Jordan grumbled. "Do you sleep with your clothes on?"

"I was already up," the television producer answered.

Jordan filled Granger in as they ate. Outside, a rented limousine waited. Twenty minutes later, the newscaster and his producer were on their way to the studios of CBC's Memphis affiliate, WMCQ-TV.

A skeleton weekend staff was on duty in the WMCQ newsroom when the New Yorkers arrived. The editor in charge informed Jordan that the balloon had been found minus the money and that they had some film on the discovery if he wanted to see it. That task fell to Granger. Jordan telephoned Weber, who jumped at the chance to be interviewed on national television. Then he undertook the more difficult task of contacting Hound Dog. Frequency hopper in hand he entered the private office the editor turned over to him and closed the door.

Jordan needn't have worried. Southgate rose that morning eager to cooperate with him. He hoped the network would intervene and do the yeoman's work for the auction. To that end, he'd turned on his frequency hopper immediately upon getting out of bed on the off chance downtown Memphis was within range of his townhouse. There'd been a lot of crackling and sputtering but nothing more.

He showered and shaved. Dressed in a pale yellow sports shirt and brown slacks, he made a quick breakfast for himself and Gershon, who'd spent the night in the guest room in order to assure an early start in the van. LN had returned to the Trimble's and even now was on a training mission with Elvie. out in back of the house. Only Togo slept. Later, he would dismantle more of the equipment still in the Trimble's basement.

His eggs eaten, Southgate put his plate in the dishwasher. The frequency hopper, now on the sink counter, gabbled again. Southgate strained an ear. Faintly, under the jumble of meaningless noises, he thought he heard a voice repeating, "Hound Dog." Then the words faded away.

He urged Gershon to hurry. "It's time to be on the road," he said.

Gershon wiped his mouth with a napkin and got up from the table still chewing a piece of toast. "I'm ready."

As they stepped outdoors, warm spring air brushed their cheeks. The two men exchanged pleased glances. A balmy, sunny Sunday meant lots of autos in the streets to help veil their identity.

The traffic was already thick when Gershon reached Poplar avenue and drove west toward the downtown area, the heat rising in shimmery waves in front of the van. Southgate listened intently to the noisy sounds of the frequency hoppers. "Hound Dog for Jordan," he called. "Hound Dog for Jordan."

Once, faintly, he was sure he'd heard Jordan respond. He frowned when the sound faded away, but then he cast a sideways glance at Gershon. "We'll be in range soon." Again the speaker hissed and squeaked. "Jordan calling Hound Dog." the words were weak but distinct. "Jordan calling Hound Dog."

"Hound Dog here."

"I barely read you." But even as he spoke the words became stronger.

"Another few minutes, Jordan."

"You're clearer already. Keep coming."

Five minutes later the van was roaring along the fringe of the central business district. Southgate sent out his call for the newscaster again.

"My reception is fine now," Jordan said. "Do you read me?"

"Like chapel chimes."

"Okay." The voice was enthusiastic. "We're ready to put the call out for your auction. We'd like you to be on our 'Issues and the Nation' in two hours."

"Live?"

"Of course."

"I'm sorry, but I can't go public like that. There's too much danger. Weber would arrest me on the spot."

Jordan laughed. "You misunderstand. I mean live over the frequency hopper."

Southgate took stock. "Oh, oh. That's different. Of course, I'll do that."

"Weber will be in the studio telling about his investigation, by the way."

Instinctively, Southgate stiffened. But he would make no demands. Let Weber pontificate. Let him discuss his theories. Let him rant about justice. He was too insular, too matter-of-fact, too pompous to matter. "Me to hike your ratings, him to lower them," he said finally.

Jordan laughed again. "I'll count on you to carry the day." He changed the subject slightly, became more business-like. "Now, you must stay within range. That's important while we're broadcasting. Your voice must be clear and strong."

"I understand."

One thing was certain. Everyone would know exactly the direction of Weber's probe.

"I'll speak to Weber briefly first since he'll be in the studio," Jordan explained. "Then, I'll switch to you. We'll do it just as we are now- conversationally. Run with the ball if you want. Don't wait for questions from me. I'll interrupt when I want the mike back."

"Sounds workable."

"There'll be a lot of listeners out there, so make your pitch good."

"I'll tell them to contact CBC," Southgate said. It was half question, half statement.

"We'll have a special telephone number which will be flashed on the screen," Jordan said. "I'll handle that part of it."

"I'll pick the finalists from those who call."

"Yes. If that's your wish. That part is up to you."

"That's my plan," Southgate said authoritatively. He took Jordan's silence as an indication the newscaster was through with his instructions. "If that's all, I'd like to sign off," Southgate said. "I've several preparations still to make."

Jordan cautioned, "Be back on the air by eleven forty-five."

"How about the sound-a-like contest?"

"They're taking care of that New York."

"Check," Southgate said.

Jordan and Weber sat close together on a blue carpeted dais in cloth covered swivel chairs, small microphones attached to their ties. White hot bulbs bathed them in light. In a third chair, looking mysterious and confidential, was the newscaster's frequency hopper.

Jordan leaned slightly forward. "Tell us, Mr. Weber, what progress have you made in your investigation?"

The Shelby county attorney general exhaled slowly. "We've begun the questioning. It's my strong belief Mr. Presley was never in his tomb at Graceland, as you know. Undoubtedly, a switching of caskets took place when he was moved from Forest Hill cemetery. That's the only plausible explanation for the woman's remains showing up at Graceland. We've questioned a half a dozen people so far in connection with the move from Forest Hill..."

He was interrupted by Jordan. "And you think Hound Dog was connected with that move, then?"

"Absolutely."

"Why would he wait so long to surface?"

"Cunning. The delay has made his trail very cold."

"But he's right here in Memphis. We're going to talk to him shortly."

"It's just a voice, Mr. Jordan. A voice from the tomb, so to speak. It's difficult to capture a voice. I need a body to go with it. Sooner or later one of those we question in connection with the move will be Hound Dog or he will lead us to him."

"It's only a matter of time, then?"

"Just a matter of time." Weber pointed to the frequency hopper. "We're checking the purchasers of those, by the way. And we're also checking scheduled burials of woman at the time Mr. Presley's body was moved. It's painstaking, time consuming labor."

"With all the elements of good detective work."

Weber's face broke into a smile. "Right."

Jordan glanced at the clip board on his knee and then looked directly into the camera, choosing his words with care. "In a few moments we'll be talking with Hound Dog. As I disclosed exclusively last night, Hound Dog first contacted CBC in connection with the disappearance of Mr. Presley's body. He asked for two minutes of our air time to sell to the highest bidder in return for disclosing the whereabouts of that body. In the public interest, and to relieve the anxieties of the millions of the late singers fans, we, of course, agreed."

The newscaster sat silently as the program switched to a commercial.



Jordan purposely didn't mention the two million dollars the network had paid Southgate the night before. Weber wasn't anxious to discuss it in light of his own embarrassment with the balloon, so he was mum also.

The program returned to Jordan, the camera close-in on his face. "And now we'll talk to Hound Dog." The camera switched to a close-up of the frequency hopper. "I'm sure many viewers don't know how this electronic device, called a frequency hopper, works," Jordan said. "It has sixteen rotating channels and stays for one-tenth of a second on each frequency. You may detect a quiver in Hound Dog's voice. We believe he has what is called a variable delay circuit in his hopper. This circuit distorts the characteristics of the voice so it can't be recognized." The anchorman tilted his head slightly. "Hound Dog are you there?"

As the camera remained on the frequency hopper, a disembodied voice said, "This is Hound Dog." The words were clear and strong.

"Hound Dog, in return for Elvis, CBC has agreed to give you ~~two~~ minutes of air time. What do you plan to do with it?"

"Mr. Jordan, I'm putting it up for auction. It will go to the person I select to plead his or her cause. You said it will go to the highest bidder. All things being equal it will. But, I will use other measurements also——"

"The time might not go on the basis of money alone then?" broke-in Jordan.

"That's correct."

"When will you hold your auction, Hound Dog?"

"Tuesday night here in the Orpheum theater in Memphis."

Jordan turned and looked into the camera. "Those interested should contact the Continental Broadcasting Corporation at its headquarters in New York City." A telephone number flashed on the screen. "Call 800-212-738 5000. We'll forward your name to Hound Dog."

"I appreciate CBC acting as my clearing house," Hound Dog said. Again the camera was on the frequency hopper in the chair.

Jordan spoke again to Hound Dog. "Will you pick the winner at that time?"

"If possible. If not, I hope I can announce the winner during the sound-a-like contest."

"Yes, folks, that contest to determine the singer who sounds the most like Elvis will be held on CBC, too, right here from Memphis' Orpheum theater on Thursday night."

Jordan turned to Weber. "Will Hound Dog still be free Tuesday night?"

Weber looked fit to explode but he managed a smile. "Not if I have my way. We're working around the clock to catch him."

Jordan turned to the camera. "But as of now he remains uncaught."  
He paused for dramatic effect as the camera moved to the frequency hopper.  
"He is obviously neither a slow nor stupid man."

The camera pulled away. Weber was livid once off the air. "You  
put me on the spot," he shouted. "Why?"

"Because the chase is part of the story. People want to know its  
status."

Weber yelled, "You news guys would double cross your own grandmother  
for a story."

Jordan laughed. "And politicians wouldn't for votes?" He stared Weber  
straight in the eye. "We've given you a million dollars worth of exposure  
today in your governor's race. Whether you sink or swim in this investigation  
is not my concern. I'll cooperate where I can. But I'm not going to roll over  
and play dead for you. Your success or failure in this investigation will  
be reported by me."

Weber stood silently for perhaps a minute, His mouth was dry and  
his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth as if it were glued there. He  
wished he'd never heard of Hound Dog.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Forty Three

Kyd Jordan stood over the Telex in the studios of WMCQ in Memphis and watched it print the names sent from New York. "My God, Clay, look at this," he exclaimed.

The TV producer leaned over the machine and saw, "Solidarity, Gdansk, Poland," followed by a New York telephone number. "How could it have a representative here?" Granger asked.

"Through the Polish American Congress, maybe."

Granger nodded. "Exciting isn't it?"

The two men continued to watch the printer clatter out the names. Some were insignificant without a chance at the two minutes, others were as surprising as Solidarity.

"Amazing," Jordan muttered as the words Chrysler Corporation, Detroit, appeared. Again, there was a call back number and the name of a representative.

"There's more than fifty already," Granger remarked. He checked his watch. The program with Hound Dog and Weber had been over three hours.

"Hound Dog said he'd contact me at four-thirty," Jordan said. "That's another thirty minutes."

In his office, Weber reached for a bottle of Spatlese. The label indicated it was from a vineyard in the upper Rhine valley near Münster. The Shelby county attorney general savored the first sip. With it came the relaxation he sought.

The round-up of suspects was slow. Although it was clear now the questioning would take several days, he was determined not to be stampeded. The final drama of Hound Dog's operation couldn't possibly come before the weekend. That gave him six days.

He took another sip. He thought of the balloon and smarted. Just then there was a rap on his office door. "Yes, come in," Weber beckoned.

Walter Tibbett, his first assistant, entered. "The men are back from checking the vault at Graceland," he said. Weber nodded. "They're satisfied it hasn't been entered." Tibbett slumped down in a chair in front of his boss's desk. "They found a few hairline cracks in the concrete here and there but that's all."

"Then, beyond a doubt there was a switch,"

"Yes, it seems so. But, so far, we've drawn nothing but blanks in the questioning. The leads go nowhere, like trails of worms in old wood."

"Anything on the frequency hoppers or the balloon?"

"Nothing yet."

Weber scowled and took another drink of his wine. He held up the bottle. "Like some " he asked his aide.

"I believe I will," Tibbett replied. He rose and fetched a glass.

Jordan

Hound Dog contacted Jordan on the dot at four-thirty.

"Your work is cut out for you," Jordan told him. "There are seventy responses, some with potential. The Moral Majority is one. The Sioux Indian Nation is another. It's an interesting bunch." Jordan paused. "Want to hear the entire list?"

"Would I ever," Hound Dog said.

Jordan began. He read rapidly until he came to the Sierra Club, where Hound Dog interrupted. "Mark that one for further consideration," he said.

Jordan continued. Hound Dog stopped him again at the Palestine Liberation Organization. "That one, too," he said. Jordan put a check in front of the name and went on. Ten callers later he read Israel.

"So," remarked Hound Dog. "We become a little United Nations."

"The call back number for the Israelis is at the U.N.," Jordan informed him. "The name is Hannah Tesslar, their ambassador."

"Hannah Tesslar," Hound Dog repeated, his voice mellow.

"You sound as if you know her," remarked Jordan.

"Just the name," replied Hound Dog. He shivered at how close he'd come to saying more. Vivid memories of her whirled within him. Five years ago Hannah Tesslar, his Tess, had been a resident lecturer in political science for a semester at Delta college. A beautiful and intelligent woman, she and Southgate had been mutually attracted and experienced a short but intense affair before she returned to Israel. Duty, she said, came before love. He thought of her tenderly now and wondered what it would be like to see her again.

"Shall I check her?" Jordan said.

"What?" Hound Dog asked, shaken from his remembrances.

"Shall I check her?" Jordan repeated.

"Certainly."

"I wasn't sure you were still there," the newscaster said and laughed.

"Go on," Hound Dog told him.

When Jordan finished, he said, "You ought to weed out the small fry."

"It's too late."

"Seventy is too many," the newscaster complained. "You'll have to make some choices. A dozen, or fifteen- that's all we want."

Hound Dog hesitated before answering. "We're dealing in high cotton, I take it," he said finally.

"We sure are." Jordan knew a tight, fast paced program would make a better telecast. If the show dragged, viewers would turn away to another network. "Narrow it down to the big bidders."

Hound Dog did some quick calculation in his head. The highest advertising rate on prime time television was \$175,000 for thirty seconds. That added up to \$700,000 for two minutes. But worldwide publicity and media coverage would make the auction even more valuable. "Let's put the floor at \$850,000," he said.

"Higher," Jordan urged.

"A million?" Hound Dog suggested.

"At least. Come Friday night yours will be the most valuable two minutes in the world."

"I'll start the bidding at one million dollars, then," Hound Dog said. "Anyone under that is automatically eliminated. Those interested should put one hundred thousand dollars in earnest money accounts at Citibank for the right to bid."

"I'll have our special operators in New York make the call backs," Jordan said.

The pair made arrangements for their next contact to be at noon on Monday.

The ivory colored telephone rang in Hannah Tesslar's New York apartment two blocks east of Central Park in the lower sixties. She'd read for several hours as the day shifted from a sunny Sunday afternoon to dusk to darkness. As she strode across the terrazzo floor of her foyer to answer she caught sight of the city's lights blinking in the streets below. Her black, sheer wool skirt pressed against her thighs.

She hadn't realized the hour.

"Hannah Tesslar," she said, removing the small gold earring from her ear as she pressed it against the receiver. Her face was finely boned, with perfectly proportioned features.

The caller was one of the special CBC operators, who explained that the bidding on Tuesday night would begin at one million dollars. A flicker of excitement shown in Hannah's dark brown eyes as she said, "I'm prepared to match that."



After double checking, the operator rang off.

Hannah Tesslar was a sabra, a native born Israeli. She'd spent the early part of the day convincing her superiors in Tel Aviv that her country should buy ~~Hound~~ Dog's time. The political assemblies of the world were tired, old arenas filled daily with thousands of meaningless words. Perhaps in two short minutes from a foreign policy outpost like Memphis the words would have a different ring. Finally, a little reluctantly, they'd agreed.

Hannah had fond recollections of the bustling hub of America's mid-south. She thought of Southgate often. The memories satisfied her, however. She'd made no effort to contact him since her arrival in New York nine months ago as the head of her country's U.N. delegation. The post was a prestigious one for her as she approached her mid-thirties.

Almost immediately, Hannah picked up the telephone again and spoke to an aide on the floor below, which housed the work space for the Israeli mission. She instructed him to make her an air reservation to Memphis on Tuesday morning.

"I'll also need a hotel room," she told him. His name was David Bass.

When he asked for how long, she answered quickly, "Until Saturday." Clearly, she expected to win.

\*\*\*\* \* \* \* \*

## Chapter Forty Four

On Monday morning fan clubs began putting pressure on Axelbank to offer a ransom for Elvis' return. White T-shirts appeared everywhere with the slogan "We Want Elvis" emblazoned in blue letters across the front.

Axelbank fidgeted over the development. He sat at his desk feeling lonely and alienated, as though he didn't have a friend. In front of him was a pile of telegrams from all around the world. Each one bore the same message. Help get Elvis back. Offer our money.

"God, this could get out of hand," he told Margaret Jean wearily.

"What are you going to do?" she asked him.

Axelbank threw up his hands. "These clubs are my bread and butter. But why should I do anything? This fellow, Hound Dog, has already promised to give the body back when the auction is over. I'd just throw money away if I intervened."

Margaret Jean, who'd been standing beside the desk, walked around and patted his cheek. "Now, now," she comforted. "Don't fret. We'll find a solution."

Axelbank picked up the telegrams and let them filter idly through his hands onto the desk again. He sighed deeply. "Don't count on it my dear."

A few blocks away, Jordan waited for Hound Dog's call. It came a couple of seconds after noon.

Seven pledges have been received for a million dollars," the newscaster told him. "Everyone else dropped out."

"Who pledged?"

"Israel, the PLO, the Moral Majority, the Sioux, Chrysler corporation, the Sierra club and Poland's Solidarity."

"They've been notified to be here at the Orpheum theater Tuesday night?"

"Notified and accepted."

"Everything is ready then?"

"We'll telecast the auditions. The rest is up to you."

"I'll handle my part." Hound Dog assured him.

"Until tomorrow night then," Jordan switched off his frequency hopper.

That evening, Weber ended another active day of investigation without any results. He was no closer to a solution than when he started. Without knowing it, he was giving the conspirators the time they needed to complete their plan.

His one accomplishment on Monday was a minor success in tracing the frequency hoppers to their mail drops. From these he learned that an old woman wearing granny glasses and supported by a cane had picked them all up on the same day just a little more than a week ago.

Walter Tibbett, his top assistant, raised the point first. "It seems odd," he said to Weber, "that someone who switched coffins four years ago would wait until the last few days to pick up their communications equipment right here in Memphis."

But Weber was like a man in hiding for a long time. He no longer wanted to see the light. Like the fish who inhabit watery pools deep in caves, he'd lost his vision. "Walter, they just wanted the most modern radios."

"Yes, that's possible," Tibbett agreed.

"You reported to me yesterday yourself that the vault was intact."

"Yes, I did. Still a switch could have been made more recently. An inside job with accomplices."

"Are you suggesting we question the security men at Graceland?"

"Yes. And the neighbors. Maybe they've seen something."

Weber's voice was cold. "I won't hear of it," he said. "You know my uncle is in charge of the security for the estate."

llll

Tibbett didn't pursue the subject further. He remained skeptical, however, "I'll call it a day then," he said. When he finally turned the lock in the front door of his home it was near midnight.

Mid-morning Tuesday at La Guardia field, the back-up of jets looked like a long, twisting conga line as the planes moved slowly to the end of the runway for take-off from New York. Hannah sat by a window in the no smoking section, two aides behind her, gazing back at the drab, grey terminal, several thoughts competing for her attention. Seemingly, they hopped through her mind daring her to snatch one and concentrate on it. But, there was no need for that, she told herself. All of them were part of the same package- her own life, Brax and her Memphis mission. They were intricately interwoven and she could skip from one to the other freely without losing continuity.

She hadn't decided yet whether to look up Southgate. She wouldn't admit to herself that she might be afraid. She had chosen to interpret the last five years as interrupted love. Now, for the first time, she was faced with the possibility that Southgate had forgotten and would reject her overture.

If she were different, she thought. If she were someone else. If she could change who she was. But, she couldn't do that. The plane bumped along. A strand of her black hair fell onto her forehead. She brushed it back.

Her mind drifted backward, like a movie film in reverse. First she was at the Hebrew University in New Jerusalem, where, as a young woman, she'd struggled and sacrificed to learn everything possible about politics. Then, as a young teenager, in Ranat Gan, outside of Tel Aviv, with the red tile roofs on stucco houses with backyard gardens. Right or wrong, by then the philosophy was ingrained in her that things in Israel were not for the here and now but that all was for tomorrow. She'd been taught this still further back in her childhood in Haifa, where she'd lived in a brownstone house (done in square Arabic style) in the hills above the bay.

The plane turned and faced the runway. In an instant it thrust forward, gathering speed until its wheels left the ground. Hannah watched the earth fall away, the familiar landmarks becoming smaller. At thirty thousand feet, the cruising altitude for the flight, she gave her thoughts to the auction. Then, as the jet engines softened and the plane slowed for its descent into Memphis, she felt as if she were free floating and she wanted to stay forever in the sky, safe from earthly emotions.

The screech of tires as the wheels took hold of the runway brought back reality. She saw the terminal. The plane taxied to the gate and she stepped inside the building. She glanced around. Suddenly, she realized she was looking for Southgate, wishing he were there to meet her. My God, Hannah, she thought, get a hold of yourself.

At intervals during the day, representatives of other participants in the auction had also arrived in Memphis.

On the evening news, Kyd Jordan stood in front of the Orpheum theater, the ever present microphone held prominently in front of him.

"In two hours, this rococo monument to the past behind me will be the scene of Hound Dog's auction. The winner, the world knows now, will appear for two minutes on CBC to plead his cause. After that, Hound Dog has promised to return Elvis. It seems fitting that this old movie house, which showed some of his films, is the location of tonight's event. It has been restored to its old glory in recent years and is now used as a civic auditorium."

Jordan pointed to the doors behind him, where double lines had formed.

"Already crowds are here waiting. Unexpectedly, this event has become the star attraction of the city's annual Cotton Carnival. The big question, of course, is how Hound Dog will conduct the auction. The Shelby County Attorney General has police stationed for several blocks around the theater. They don't know what Hound Dog looks like, but they would recognize his trade mark- the frequency hopper he uses to communicate his wishes."

Jordan paused for dramatic effect.

"So, the stage is set. The world will be watching what happens here in Memphis tonight."

Jordan traded the microphone to a crew technician for the frequency hopper. He turned to Granger. "I'd hoped he would contact me while I was on the air."

Granger replied, "I think he's lying low until the auction."

"I wonder where," Jordan speculated.

At that moment, Hound Dog was already set up in a room in the Peabody hotel, a stone's throw away from the Orpheum. The distance in-between consisted mainly of a couple of open blocks of leveled land scheduled for urban renewal.

Southgate had checked into the hotel earlier in the day as Earl Bottomley from Little Rock. His room was on the eighth floor facing the direction of the theater. He had his frequency hopper. Jordan had one and the others had been delivered to the theater. He waited now for the telecast to begin.

The theater's seats filled as soon as the doors were opened. Two of the more interested spectators were Togo and LN, who sat midway back on the main floor's center aisle. Gershon remained outside scouting the police. As the participants in the auction arrived, they were escorted to the stage by ushers hired by CBC. Crews manned TV cameras at a half a dozen stations in the theater and Kyd Jordan sat in a hastily built glass booth at one side of the stage, visible to the audience.



When the appointed hour arrived, the theater was quiet. From his booth, Kyd Jordan described the scene to the television audience, his frequency hopper beside him. The cameras swept the audience and then zoomed in on the bidders on stage. They were a colorful group. Chief Eagle Feather was in full tribal regalia. The Reverend Jimmy Logan of the Moral Majority wore a clerical collar, a Bible in his lap. Mehdi Majali of the PLO was in a flowing white robe, topped by a headcloth. Curtis Harlow of the Chrysler Corporation, Josef Gornicki for Solidarity and Hamilton Rogers of the Sierra Club wore business suits. Hannah was in a smartly tailored rose suit and a soft white, silk blouse. A small microphone hung in front of the frequency hopper in Jordan's booth ready to pick up Hound Dog's voice.

In his hotel room, Hound Dog watched on television. When the camera reached Hannah he turned down the sound to avoid feedback in the hoppers and spoke into his.

"Welcome," he said to the bidders. A collective gasp of excitement swept through the audience. "I'm honored that you came and I'm sorry you all can't win. The bidding opens at one million dollars. In addition, I'll weigh the merit of your subject matter. So, the two minutes on Friday night won't automatically go to the highest bidder. Money talks, but not completely. There are several frequency hoppers on the stage. You must use one for me to hear you. I suggest that you pick one up when I call your name. Make your bid, then tell me what you will discuss if you're awarded the time on Friday. Chief Eagle Feather lets begin with you."

As Southgate watched on TV, the chief rose and took a frequency hopper. "I bid one million dollars, one hundred thousand dollars." After a pause he continued, standing tall and proud. "My plea would be that the American government release us as wards and do away with our reservations. It is intolerable that such a system of suppression still exists."

With that, the chief sat down.

"Mr. Harlow," Hound Dog called out.

The auto executive rose. Chief Eagle Feather handed him a frequency hopper. "Thank you, Chief Eagle Feather," he said crisply. "I must use this, however, to raise your bid by another one hundred thousand dollars. I want the time to convince the American auto buyer that our new cars are as well built as foreign imports and get as many miles to the gallon."

"Miss Tesslar."

Hannah picked up the frequency hopper nearest her and remained seated, her back ramrod straight and her legs crossed at the ankles. "I also will raise the bid by another one hundred thousand dollars. If awarded the time, I will plead for an end to the hatred and violence in the mideast and put forward an Israeli pledge for cooperation."

Southgate locked his eyes on her cool radiance. She was even more beautiful than he remembered. There was a maturity to her features now that added a haunting lived-in look. Before Southgate realized she'd finished, there'd been perhaps a half a minute of silence.

"Mr. Gornicki," he said, his brain beginning to function properly again.

The Polish spokesman, a defector to the west, stood and took the frequency hopper from Hannah. "I will bid one million, four hundred thousand dollars," he said in accented English. "If granted the opportunity, I will use the two minutes to push for free trade unions throughout the communist bloc. To borrow a thought from Karl Marx- we have nothing to lose but our chains."

Gornicki sat down. Next, Southgate called on the Reverend Jimmy Logan, who rose, Bible in one hand, a frequency hopper in the other. "I will bid one and a half million dollars," he said. The audience stirred. "Our cause is mass decency. There must be less violence and depravity in the arts. That would be my message."

The preacher sat down. That left Hamilton Rogers and Mehdi Majali.

"Mr. Rogers do you still want to bid?" Hound Dog asked the representative of the Sierra Club.

"I'll bid another one hundred thousand," he replied, standing with a frequency hopper. "We want the time to speak on behalf of our environment. Contrary to the Secretary of the Interior, Ding Batt, we don't believe the world is near an end and consequently that our resources can be squandered. We believe the world has a long way to go and that this man should be fired in its best interests."

The PLO representative, Mehdi Majali, took the frequency hopper in anticipation of his turn. When Hound Dog called his name, he stood, his robes rustling.

"I will raise the last bid another one hundred thousand dollars," he said. "I would use the time to plead for a Palestinian state. We have the same right to a native land as others." He sat down.

"Well," said Hound Dog. "No one has yet fallen by the wayside. You've all told why you want the time and your explanations are clear. So, let's continue with the bidding. Who is prepared to go higher than one million, six hundred thousand dollars?"

"One million, eight," said Harlow.

Gornicki countered with two million and Chief Eagle Feather with two million, fifty thousand.

An excited murmur swept through the audience. It leaned forward anxious for another bid.

"Two million, one hundred thousand," Hannah called out.

There was a long silence. Tensions increased. A sense of climax filled the theater. Then the audience heard Hound Dog's voice saying, "I think there should be a time limit for the rest of you to outbid Miss Tesslar. You have one minute."

The seconds ticked away.

"Two million, one hundred and twenty five thousand," Majali said quietly.

Hound Dog said, "Again, there is a one minute limit."

The Reverend Jimmy Logan shifted in his chair and bid two million, one hundred and fifty thousand.

"Two million, one hundred and sixty thousand," said Harlow.

Gornicki, who'd sat for some time with his eyes closed, came suddenly to life and called out, "two million, one hundred and seventy thousand."

Again, there was a lengthy silence.

"Two million, one hundred and seventy five thousand," Hannah said.

"Two million, one hundred and eighty," Majali put in quickly.

The audience waited, spellbound. The ancient antagonisms of the middle east were being fought right on the stage in front of them. Surely, Hannah would bid again. But the next voice belonged to the Reverend Logan shouting, "two million one hundred and eighty five."

"Two million, one hundred and ninety," said Harlow. "And that will be my final bid." Roger Hamilton of the Sierra Club and Chief Eagle Feather had both been silent for sometime already.

Majali spoke up again. "Two million, two hundred thousand."

Harlow shrugged. The Reverend Logan tapped the cover of his Bible with his fingers than leaned back in his chair, his bidding obviously over. "It's hard to put a price on freedom," Gronicki said. "But for Solidarity tonight it is two million, two hundred and five thousand."

The audience clapped in support. Then all eyes shifted to Hannah and Majali. Silence seeped through the theater again. Hannah shifted in her chair. "One minute," Hound Dog said.

"Two million, two hundred and ten thousand," shouted the PLO representative, who now held a frequency hopper in his hand permanently.

"I'll raise that five thousand," Hannah said.

"And I five more," said Majali.

Again silence. Nervously, Majali tugged at his robes. Hannah watched him, wondering for the first time if perhaps there was a limit to Arab oil money for the Palestinians after all. Almost two and a quarter million dollars was a lot of money to pay for two minutes of television time, she thought. But she knew that the spirited bidding between her and Majali would add even more interest. With satellite transmission around the world, a record number of viewers might watch. She decided to make one more bid. "Two million, two hundred and twenty five thousand dollars," she said boldly.

"One minute, Mr. Majali," Hound Dog said.

Several seconds passed before Majali spoke. "That won't be necessary," he said. "My last bid has been made."

Hound Dog's response was prompt. "Well, we have a clear winner in the bidding," he said. "However, as I pointed out earlier, I might consider other factors. On that basis, I'm going to allow Solidarity to remain in the running. I'll announce my decision no later than the sound-a-like contest Thursday night. I'd like Miss Tesslar to take a frequency hopper with her. I want to talk to her alone. Meanwhile, will a representative of CBC please collect the others?"

Hound Dog signed off. Jordan recapped the event and left the air.

Weber, his face drawn, watched the theater empty like a man hiding among endless crowds. He wrestled a troubled dream for he sensed his bid for the governorship was fading with each new day of Hound Dog's antics. He couldn't get a grasp on the situation.

His first assistant stood on the sidewalk beside him. "He's slipped away from us again," Tibbett said in a somber voice.

Weber gazed at the lights dotting the buildings around them like glowworms. "I'd stake a million dollars that he's behind one of those windows," he said drearily.

"But we had those buildings under surveillance constantly."

"Those close-in, yes. Our problem is that he doesn't need to be that near the theater when he uses the frequency hoppers." Weber made a sweep with his arm. "We can't watch every building in the downtown area."

"We gave it our best effort."

"Tell that to the voters," Weber sighed. "It's not that they want Hound Dog caught. To the contrary. It's that they think I'm a fool."

"You'll bounce back, Van," Tibbett encouraged.

Weber shook his head. "Only with a break and soon." A curl of fear wiggled in his bowels.

Southgate closed the door of his hotel room quietly behind him and hurried down the hall on his way to meet Togo and LN. He was relaxed. The auction had gone well.

As he reached the street and strode toward the Orpheum, however, he encountered members of the audience. He smiled and exchanged glances, a flickering probe. For Southgate, it was a strange feeling and he was certain a rather furtive look crossed his face. But the people, homeward bound, didn't notice.

At the theater, a few stagglers huddled in the lobby. Southgate dodged among them. Suddenly, he stopped and looked around feeling her eyes on him. The recognition was immediate and warm. They gazed at each other and though the instant was short it seemed long to both of them.

Gently, he called to her, "Tess." It was an endearment of old, but he felt uncertain of himself. "Hannah," he said louder, "what a wonderful surprise."

For a moment, she turned away looking back into some other period of time. Then she stepped away from her aides and moved forward until they stood facing each other. Southgate hesitated, worried that she might realize his voice and Hound Dog's were the same as they talked even though the variable delay circuit in his frequency hopper disgrised it. So, wordlessly, he studied her, a beauty so perfect to him that it seemed as if it had been beaten into her.

At last, Hannah broke the silence. "I hoped you'd come," she said, her eyes happy.

He smiled then and she felt unraveled despite the years apart. "You handled yourself exceptionally well," he told her.

"You saw it all?"



"Every second."

"I was so nervous," She shifted slightly.

"No one could tell," he said, seeing the curve of her breast under her blouse.

She looked at him, her eyes unblinking. "Do you think I offered too much money for the time?"

With considerable effort, Southgate stifled a laugh. "Why, not at all," he said suavely. "You'll get your money's worth and more." The more, he hoped, would be a rekindling of their love.

But she was ahead of him. "The more, I already have," she said and reached for his hand. Like magic, the touch between them awoke their hibernating emotions. Impetuously, their fingers entwined and squeezed the last shadows of unsureness from their reunion.

Togo and LN approached. Hannah saw them out of the corner of her eye. She leaned forward. "There's Togo Bridger," she whispered to Southgate. He turned and followed the direction of her glance. LN waved.

"Hi, Hannah," Togo said when he was beside her. "You were great."

"Just super," LN added.

Both of them had known her at Delta, when she lectured there.

"You all make me feel very good," Hannah replied.

An aide was next to her, whispering in her ear. She smiled. "David thinks I should get back to the hotel, in case Hound Dog tries to contact me. I suppose I should go."

Southgate spoke up. "You have time," he said wrly. "No doubt he knows you're still here in the theater."

"Just the same, I should be ready."

"You're right," LN said. "Don't let us detain you."

"I'll be in touch," Southgate said. Hannah nodded and smiled at his choice of words as she and her two aides, David Bass and Simon Ochs, stepped out for the walk back to their hotel.

The theater was nearly deserted and the stage was dark except for the lights in Kyd Jordan's booth. The newscaster was on the network's direct line to New York. The voice of Paul Wiley oscillated in his ear. The chairman was estatic.

"We polled by telephone during the show. Think of it. Nearly seventy per cent of the viewers," he crowed. "It'll break all records for the sweeps."

"Just what you predicted," Jordan put in when the CBC executive paused for breath.

"I only wish we were selling those two minutes oursælves," Wiley said wistfully. "Hound Dog is being paid five hundred and fifty six thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars every thirty seconds. God, that's two hundred thousand more than a spot on the Super Bowl."

Wiley hung up. Relaxed and off camera, Jordan yawned. A fly battered itself against the booth's window pane. The anchorman watched its futile effort and thought of Weber.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Forty Five

"It was a bit of showmanship," Southgate explained to Togo and Gershon. "By singling out Solidarity I gave it a boost, but the time should go to the highest bidder. It's the only fair way."

"Is that why you told Hannah to keep the frequency hopper?" Togo asked.

Southgate nodded. "I'm going to contact her so she can move ahead on the Israeli payment but I still won't make the announcement until the sound-a-like contest Thursday night. Let's keep the interest high."

"The contest is important to LN," said Togo.

"Another reason we want to have maximum exposure. Delaying the announcement of the winner until then will help make it a great mixture of Elvis music and suspense."

Southgate and his two companions sat in his hotel room. The second hand of his watch swept past the hour of eleven. He motioned to Gershon. "You'd better get along with it," he said. Gershon nodded and slipped out the door. A few minutes later, on schedule, he stepped from the stairwell and walked down the corridor to Hannah's room. Quickly and quietly, he hooked the dark suede bag on her door knob and withdrew.

An hour had elapsed since Southgate last talked to Hannah in the guise of Hound Dog and she'd begun to think a call from him wouldn't come that night.

458a

She'd already turned to dismiss her aides when the frequency hopper crackled like a wrinkled piece of cellophane and a deep voice errupted from the speaker. "Miss Tesslar, this is Hound Dog."

"Yes, I'm here," she replied.

"Miss Tesslar, It's my judgment that the only fair winner is the highest bidder and that is Israel. Solidarity has made a great effort on the behalf of freedom, however, and it should be recogized for that. I want to give it the backing I can so I'll wait until Thursday night to officially announce you the winner. Meanwhile, you can get your payment to Memphis. There's a black suede bag hanging from your door knob," Hound Dog's distorted voice quavered. "Will you get it, please?"

Hannah stared at the speaker, fascinated and wondered what this possibly had to be with her bid. Simon Ochs, one of her aides, hopped to his feet and retrived the article.

"I have it," she said.

"That's for my payment. Please guard it carefully," Hound Dog directed.

"No other bag is to be used."

"The money will never fit," Hannah blurted impetuously.

"You're quite right," Hound Dog replied. "But diamonds will. My payment is to be in gems."

Hannah gasped and her heart beat increased. "But there's so little time," she pleaded.

"Come now. A sovereign power with the resources of state at its disposal certainly can round up a little more than two million dollars in diamonds." The voice was patient and she was thankful.

"When is the payment to be made?" she asked anxiously.

"No later than Friday night. I want stones worth at least ten thousand dollars each wholesale. They should all be brilliant cut. The color should be E, F or G and they should be VS 2 or better."

"How will I deliver them?"

"We'll discuss that once the stones are in your possession."

"I see."

"Best you concentrate first on getting them, isn't it?"

"It is a tall order."

"I won't keep you then."

When she was certain that Hound Dog had signed off, Hannah, conscious of security, snapped off the frequency hopper before she picked up the telephone. The call went to the Israeli embassy in Washington, where the ambassador listened to her instructions and then, shortly before midnight, Memphis time, relayed them to Tel Aviv.

It was already eight o'clock the next morning in the Israeli capital when the ambassador's call came through. A short time later, a government official entered the Israel Diamond Exchange and approached Moshe Green, the best known dealer in the Jewish state.

The two men shook hands. "Louis Barak, what brings you here?" Green asked.

"I must talk to you in secrecy," confided Barak. "It is a matter of great urgency. By sundown we must have commitments for two million, two hundred and twenty five thousand dollars in diamonds for delivery to our embassy in Washington by Friday morning."

Green looked at his friend. "An interesting amount," he said, an eyebrow raised. "It corresponds exactly with our bid in Memphis."

"Draw your own conclusion, Moshe, but don't dwell on it at the expense of getting the job done. What can our own Barmatz factory supply?"

"Not that much."

"Even though we claim to lead the world in diamond finishing?"

"We'll still need outside help. How do you want them?"

Barak repeated Hound Dog's instructions to Hannah.

Green nodded. "Leave me now," he said. "I must get started."

Barak murmured, "mazel und broche," the traditional Hebrew phrase for luck and blessing and clasped Green's hand. The deal was sealed. With that, the government official made his way back through the rows of dealers' tables, where discerning eyes, trained by experience, examined the day's gems.

It was now a waiting game.

Moshe Green liked intrigue. With pressure from the government he no doubt could have rounded up the entire shipment he needed in his adopted land. Diamonds, after all, were Israel's leading export, valued at more than a billion dollars a year. But, he had ties in Amsterdam, where his father had been in the trade before the Nazi occupation in World War II, and also in Antwerp and New York City.

He placed calls to business friends in all three cities. He couldn't tell them why, he said, but he needed some brilliant cut gems, E, F or G color, VS 2 or better, worth at least ten thousand dollars each wholesale. He hoped, of course, they would guess why. He needed them in two days at the Israeli embassy in Washington, he told them.

The brilliant cut he sought was round and also the most popular, easy to re-sell.

LN had just walked into her townhouse after another night at the Trimble's and a late night training session with Elvie when her phone rang.

"I'm glad I caught you," said the voice on the other end. It was Margaret Jean.

"What's happening?" LN asked.

"Can you come downtown? Alan is about to go bananas from the demands of fan clubs to do something about Elvis. I've got a hunch he might be more receptive now to helping the library."

"How's that?" LN asked. She was puzzled but, at the same time, excited.

"It's a little convoluted. The big clamor is for him to pay a ransom. He refuses. Says it's just throwing money away. But he's searching for an out, somehow to placate the clubs. If you can think of some reason for him to use the library, well...."

LN laughed. "I see what you mean."

"Will you be down?"

"As soon as I can."

The two women hung up. LN touched up her make-up, then dashed for her car. She had so much to do. In seventy two hours, the Trimble's would be home. Their house had to be ready. And there was Elvie. He had to be kept on his toes. His part in all this wasn't over. But, she couldn't forgo the library either. For a few hours at least, she would give it priority.

Margaret Jean's call to LN wasn't the only interesting telephone conversation in Memphis that morning. A few minutes before ten, the phone jangled in Weber's office.

"There's a Dr. Willis Berry on the line," his secretary informed him. "Says he was Elvis' dentist."

"Put him on," Weber instructed.

"Mr. Weber, I'm Dr. Willis Berry. My nurse helped you identify Elvis' dental work when I was out of town."

"Yes," Weber broke in. "She was very helpful."



"I'm sure she was. She's very efficient and, in her defense, she told you all she knew." Weber was alert now and pressed the receiver closer to his ear. The dentist continued. "She gave me the details this morning, of course, when I arrived here at my office. I apologize for being away last week, Mr. Weber, and I thought I'd better call you now. My X-rays are complete except for one detail and I think it will be an important one to you. The night before Elvis died he came to my office and I filled a cavity for him. He was in considerable pain. The tooth had been acting up all that day. He was in a hurry, however, and I didn't take an X-ray. What I'm saying, Mr. Weber, is this. Whoever sent those X-ray plates to Mr. Jordan didn't take them after Elvis died. They are one-filling short.

Weber slumped in his chair, his face drained of color. "Are you saying Hound Dog doesn't have Elvis' body?"

"Maybe he does. Maybe he doesn't. I don't know. But those are not new X-rays he sent. That I do know."

Weber was charged with hope of a lead at last. In a shaky voice, he asked, "Who had the set of X-rays besides you?"

"I know of no one," Dr. Berry replied quickly. "I've guarded them carefully. Duplicates could have been made without my knowing, of course. I'm not here twenty fours a day."

"Your nurse?"

"Never."

"I'd still like to question her again."

"Of course. But, if you want my opinion. I think you've got a first class confidence man on your hands."

"There is Elvis, then?"

"Wherever he is, he's got one more filling than the world knows about. That's all I can tell you."

After he'd hung up, Weber sat staring at the ceiling. If he looked on the bright side, the penalty for operating a confidence game could be pretty stiff.

LN pulled her Triumph into a public garage near the skyscraper which housed the headquarters of Axelbank's empire of fan clubs and swung her nylon covered legs onto the pavement.

A red jacketed attendant jabbed a receipt into a time clock. Upon withdrawal, he tore along a perforation across the middle, gave her half, and tucked the other half under the car's windshield wiper.

"I'll be about an hour," she called over her shoulder, hurrying off.

"Okay, lady. No sweat." The voice trailed away.

In front of the entrance to Axelbank's building, LN encountered several dozen pickets wearing "We want Elvis" T-shirts. They carried cardboard signs. "It's our money. Pay it," one read. Another proclaimed, "Do your duty, Axelbank." As the elevator whisked her to the nineteenth floor, LN felt a certain empathy for the beleaguered entrepreneur and the burden which had befallen him.

A bell pinged and the elevator doors slid open. LN stepped out toward the two giant glass doors with the gold painted images of a man playing a guitar, musical notes floating above him. At the receptionist's desk, a harried Sue Ann needed three arms. The phones were ringing off of their hooks with demands to talk to Axelbank. She gestured to LN with her head toward Margaret Jean's office as she put one receiver down and picked up another one.

LN nodded in understanding. She glanced at the large montage of color photos of Elvis which covered the wall and disappeared into Margaret Jean's office. "How is he?" she whispered after the door closed again.

"Unnerved."

"I saw the demonstrators downstairs."

"They've demanded a meeting with him. He's promised to see them at noon." Margaret Jean rose. "I'll tell him you're here." A moment later she motioned LN in.

LN felt her heels sink into the rich Persian carpet of Axelbank's office. "Alan," she said, pronouncing his name slowly and distinctly. "What are they doing to you?"

Axelbank stood up behind his massive oak desk to face LN and brushed a hand over his bald head. His usually well trimmed fringe of brown hair was ruffled and his eyes were bloodshot. "For one thing, a loss of sleep." He pointed to a leather chair in front of him. "Please, sit down."

LN seated herself. "You poor man," she sympathized. A scratch sheet lay untouched on the desk top. Axelbank saw her glance. "I can't even concentrate on my beloved horses anymore," he moaned.

"Well, we're going to change that," LN told him, a mother-like ring to her voice.

"If only we could," he sighed. He gazed helplessly at the fish swimming worrilessly in the aquarium in the wall opposite him.

"We can." LN leaned forward. "There's a way and the fan clubs will love you for it."

"No ransom," Axelbank cut in.

"Alan, listen to her," Margaret Jean scolded from the leather chair next to LN.

"It's something to do with the library," he said gloomily.

"What if it does," replied Margaret Jean. "It's time you thought of something besides horses."

"Alan, an association with the library can save you from further grief," LN said. "The idea of a ransom is out of the question, I agree. Pledge two million dollars to make certain the memory and genius of Elvis will live on unblemished by the mysterious disappearance of his body. A library is a lasting tribute."

Axelbank eyed her keenly. "There's a certain logic to your argument. A library is a timeless memorial." He paused in thought and said half to himself, "I could write it off of my income tax, of course." Then louder again to LN. "Do you think an announcement would calm the jangled nerves of the fans?"

"The odds are good," said LN.

"How good? I've always insisted on knowing the odds of any undertaking."

Margaret Jean's face broke into a wide smile. "Alan, you're always placing long shots. Don't be so sanctimonious."

"Two million dollars is still a lot of money, my dear."

The women fell silent as Axelbank pondered his fate. Shortly, he must face the delegation from the fan clubs. It would be folly to send them away empty handed. He was certain such disdain would be the beginning of the end of his federation. He'd convinced the clubs he was their direct link to Elvis. Now, they'd demand he act in that role. He'd resisted the library, not in principle, but because of his stinginess. The latter no longer seemed relevant in light of the clamor for him to pledge money for the body's return. The question had become what was the best use of his funds.

"All right, the library it is," he said at last.

The women jumped from their chairs and rushed around the desk. Margaret Jean kissed one cheek and LN the other. "We'll hold a news conference right here tomorrow morning," LN replied.

"How about the delegation today?" Margaret Jean asked Axelbank.

"Have them come up to my office. I'll tell it I'll have an important announcement in twenty-four hours."

CBC went to Memphis again for its lead that night on the Evening News. Kyd Jordan was poised in front of the courthouse at twilight, microphone in hand.

"Another startling development has taken place here in Memphis today. Dr. Willis Berry, Elvis Presley's dentist, disclosed that the X-rays used to confirm his dental work didn't include a filling made the night before the singer's death. This raises the possibility that Hound Dog doesn't have the star's body as claimed. At the very least, he hasn't opened the coffin and taken X-rays of the teeth.

"Shelby County Attorney General Van Weber believes the X-rays are duplicates made by someone from Dr. Berry's files. Maybe so. It's all just one more strange twist to the mystery of Hound Dog. At last word, Hound Dog promised to give Elvis back after CBC airs a two minute statement by the winner of his auction. to be announced Thursday night. This will be either Israel or the Polish union, Solidarity. The auction drew one of the largest television audiences in history."

"In a related move here, Alan Axelbank, president of the International Federation of Fan Clubs, has called a news conference for noon tomorrow. Since the disappearance of Elvis, Axelbank has been urged by the fan clubs to offer a ransom for the return of their hero to his tomb. Word tonight, however, is that Axelbank has an alternative in mind. CBC will cover the news conference live.

"This is Kyd Jordan from the Shelby county courthouse in Memphis."

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Forty Six

By the hour Kyd Jordan completed his broadcast, Simon Ochs, one of Hannah's two aides had flown out of Memphis to Washington to pick up the diamonds at the Israeli embassy there. The Israeli foreign ministry had sent word from Tel Aviv a short time earlier that Moshe Green had finished his purchases and that all of the gems would be in the American capital by mid-morning Thursday.

The Jewish diamond dealer had bought 121 carats for the two million, two hundred and twenty five thousand dollars. Fourth-fifths of them were now in the custody of couriers in jet aircrafts high over the Atlantic bound for Kennedy International airport, New York City. True to his plan, Green had spread the buying across three continents- two fifths in Tel Aviv and one-fifth each in Amsterdam, Antwerp and New York.

He'd dealt with old friends he trusted and for the final act of gathering the diamonds together in New York for the last leg of their journey down to Washington he'd put his faith in a close American associate, Danny Edelman. Twice a year at least Green visited Edelman in New York's diamond district in west 47th street between Fifth avenue and the Avenue of the Americas, where the American headed the Diamond Brokers', one of sixteen clubs set up in ten countries around the world to facilitate the movement of gems among buyers, dealers, manufacturers, brokers and jewelers.

After watching Jordan's newscast, Edelman enjoyed a leisurely dinner with his wife in their home on Long Island. Then, he drove to Kennedy to meet the first courier, a young Dutchman from Amsterdam. Several hours later a Sabena Belgian World Airways plane landed. Inside the terminal the courier from Antwerp unobtrusively transferred his gems to Edelman. The traveler from Israel had the longest flight. First, he flew on El Al to Zurich. He transferred to Swissair there for New York and the orange rim of the sun was already above the horizon when he greeted Edelman. The precious stones, which the couriers carried in diplomatic pouches, quickly passed between them.

They ate breakfast together while Edelman waited for his flight to Washington on the first Eastern shuttle of the day. In all, the diamonds he now carried weighed a little less than an ounce.

The American capital was a beautiful sight to Edelman as his plane threaded its way along the Potomac river valley in a gradual descent into National airport. The city radiated a feeling of power and strength. On the ground, he was met by a car from the embassy. As he climbed inside, the ambassador shook his hand.

Soon the car moved along the tree shaded thoroughfares of northwest Washington to the Israeli embassy in the sixteen hundred block of Twenty Second street. There Edelman gave the diamonds to Simon Ochs, Hannah's aide, and went to bed. In three hours, Ochs would board an American airlines jet bound for Memphis. It was now a few minutes before ten.



Shortly before noon in Memphis, television and radio wires criss-crossed the floor of Axelbank's office. A crush of reporters, including Jordan, crowded into the area in front of his desk bantering with each other while they waited. Jordan was ecstatic. This was an unexpected development in the story that he'd started and it kept the momentum rolling.

Promptly at twelve, Axelbank entered, his usually rumpled suit crisply pressed. LN and Margaret Jean walked beside him, drawing low whistles of admiration from a few of the younger reporters.

Once seated, Axelbank eyed the journalists expectantly and nodded, a sign he was ready to begin. A hush fell over the room.

"I'm pleased to announce today that the International Federation of Elvis Presley Fan Clubs is donating two million dollars to Delta college for construction of a library in memory of the late singer," he began, looking into the TV cameras. Then, borrowing words here and there that LN had spoken to him the day before, he said, "I believe this is a more functional use of our money than offering a ransom for the return of Elvis' body. The donation will make certain that the memory and genius of Elvis will live on unblemished by the mysterious disappearance of his body. The library will be a permanent remembrance for fans and scholars alike to use to study both Elvis' music and his life and their influence on the world."

Axelbank stood up to face LN. "My dear, I know how much this means to you," he said smoothly, handing her the check.

LN eyed the check happily.

A reporter broke the silence. "Mr. Axelbank, why are you against paying a ransom?"

"It would be a gamble with no guarantee of results. In the end the money might simply be gone with nothing accomplished."

Another reporter spoke-up "Has there been a ransom demand? This isn't clear to me."

"The idea of paying a ransom was suggested by fans. I discouraged this notion. The clubs approved the library donation as an alternative and hope, like me, that it will make fans everywhere happy again."

Axelbank directed his gaze toward a man standing to one side of the room. "Mr. Manuel would you like to say a few words?"

There was a rustle of papers as everyone turned. Axelbank explained, "This is Chesly Manuel. He headed the delegation representing the fan clubs with whom I met."

Manuel stepped up beside Axelbank. "Speaking for the fan clubs, we enthusiastically support the library donation," he said. "We hope Hound Dog will take recognition of this gesture as a sign of our concern for Elvis. Without the events of the last few days, I don't believe Mr. Axelbank would have been willing to make the contribution."

Manuel wore a "We Want Elvis" T-shirt. LN and Margaret Jean smiled broadly.

"I'd like to say a few words if I may," LN said. "Naturally, Delta College is grateful for this very generous check. Ground will be broken promptly. For those of you who are interested I have an architect's drawing of the building with me." After a moment's pause, she continued. "One more very important note. The library will be named in honor of Mr. Axelbank. It will be officially called The Alan Axelbank Library for Elvis Presley Studies."

The reporters crowded forward and peppered LN with more questions about her feelings. When they were gone, Margaret Jean stole forward and fondly took Axelbank's hand and put her head on his shoulder. LN waved goodbye and scooted out to deposit the check before Axelbank changed his mind.

At two o'clock that afternoon the shiny skinned American airlines jetliner with the diamonds aboard touched down at Memphis International airport. Simon Ochs carried them off in a black briefcase chained and locked to his wrist during the flight. A burly security officer from the embassy, ever alert despite his quick grin, walked a few steps behind him. Outside of the terminal in the spring sunshine they climbed into a waiting car and a half hour later the gems were safely in Hannah's hotel room.

The aide spread them out on a white piece of paper on top of the writing desk, where they glistened like sparkling little pieces of splintered ice.

"They're beautiful," Hannah said, coming to life. A strange thrill ran through her. With a sudden impulsive movement she ran nervous fingers over the gems. They were hard and cold.

After a time, she opened a drawer in a nearby cabinet and removed the black suede bag left on her door knob by Gershon. Slowly, almost reluctantly, she carefully placed the precious stones in it and drew the raw leather strings around the top into a knot.

"Now, we wait for Hound Dog to tell us what to do next," she said with an air of expectation.

Sometime later, Hannah heard a soft knock. She thought at first that one of her aides had returned for some reason, but when she opened the door Southgate stood on the threshold. A warm sensation rippled through her body.

"Hi, Tess," he said with his easy charm.

His words had a peculiar music to Hannah, a caressing sound, that brought a rosy flush to her cheeks. She put out a hand and drew him into the room. For a moment it seemed neither of them breathed, then he closed the door behind him. As always, the sight of her, with features as delicate as a light perfume, pleased him.

He hadn't wanted to come, preferring to wait until after the diamonds were delivered. But, he could delay no longer. Even now, he felt awkward though he knew by the openness of her greeting that she suspected nothing. He was glad. He'd worried about this moment.

"I was beginning to think you wouldn't come," she said.

Suddenly tense, Southgate glanced around. The room was elegant, its muted gold and white colors an ideal frame for Hannah's dark beauty. As he looked at her, she was even more breathtaking than he remembered.

"I hadn't heard from you in five years," Southgate replied dryly.

"Be fair," she said. The glow in her eyes dulled momentarily. "I made a choice and I've stuck to it until now."

They walked across the room, the late afternoon sun shining through the sheer white curtains in small, bright circles on the rich carpet.

"You've done well with both your promise and your career," Southgate said.

Hannah smiled appreciatively. "I've devoted everything to them." She hesitated, her gaze steady. "There's still no one else, Brax."

Southgate broke off her stare and looked around the combination sitting and bedroom. The ceiling and walls were joined by deep crown molding. A long couch delineated the two areas. In front of it was a low marble topped coffee table flanked by two easy chairs. The queen sized bed was covered by a rich looking gold and white antique satin spread that matched drapes framing the several windows. They sat down in the chairs.

"I wanted to write," Hannah continued. "I started to many times."

"But you didn't."

"No."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe, I wasn't ready to say my need for you comes before everything else."

"Are you now?"

She looked away. "Dammit," she exclaimed, "I don't know. Seeing you again makes it much more difficult."

Hannah's spirits sagged. She rose from her chair and dropped down on the floor in front of Southgate. She cuddled against the warmth of his legs and rested her head on his knees. After a few moments she looked up and smiled. Southgate cradled her face in his hands. When she didn't resist, he kissed her lightly several times.

"It was difficult when you left," he whispered. "I lived for months on memories."

"I know," she sighed, holding his hands.

Their touches fed on each other. He pushed her back until she was lying down, then slid to the floor beside her. He kissed her throat. She moaned softly and closed her eyes. She wanted to make love to him. She pulled his face to hers and kissed him longingly, stroking the hair at the base of his neck.

She ached pleasantly from her aroused feelings. But when he pressed close to her, she rolled away and stood up.

A strand of hair fell loosely over her forehead. She brushed it back. Then, she saw the frustration on his face and thought he looked like a little boy. There'd always been a directness about Hannah. She knelt and kissed him, smiling at her previous reluctance. He stroked her cheeks and neck and finally her breasts. This time she didn't resist.

In the dying light of day, about the same time Southgate left the hotel, Weber listened in his office a few blocks away to his top deputy report on the latest move to trap Hound Dog.

"We're concentrating on Miss Tesslar since she has a frequency hopper," Tibbett explained. "But, if Mr. Gornicki leaves the Peabody before Hound Dog announces his winner we'll put a microphone in his room, too."

"The hotel has been staked out since noon," Weber pointed out.

Tibbett grimaced. "Neither one has gone out. We spotted one of the ambassador's aides returning to the hotel with a briefcase chained to his wrist and with a body guard. We assume it was official business. That's all we've seen. Sheila and the men are waiting. We'll do it as soon as possible."

"And if they don't go out?"

"Sheila is posing as a maid. If they don't leave their rooms, she'll go in to turn down their beds for the night about eight or eight-thirty and plant the bugs." Tibbett paused. "It's not ideal, we'd like to work the rooms without them, but it's a solid back-up position."



Weber took a deep breath. "If they'd only go out, even for just a half hour."

"I'd guess they're both waiting for word from Hound Dog, especially the gal since she has a frequency hopper."

"Well, I'll feel better when the microphones are in place."

Tibbett, with no more to report, asked, "Did you have any problems getting the court order for them?"

"It was done privately in chambers. The judge was sympathetic. He was a bit fiesty at first about the Jewish broad being a diplomat and possible international repercussions but his concern for our beloved Elvis won out." Weber laughed. "Hell, I argued that all governments listen in on each other every chance they get."

"What was his answer?" Tibbett asked, cocking an eyebrow.

"He agreed. I made the point that in this case we were listening in only to get Hound Dog. I assured him we'd turn a deaf ear to everything else, that we don't give a damn about Israel's secrets."

"That won him over?"

"That and the fact it's Elvis. He really wanted to help."

Weber rose and stretched. "How about the Orpheum?"

"Same plan we used Tuesday night," Tibbett told him.

\*\*\*\*\*

Still later that afternoon, when LN returned in triumph to her home, she found Togo waiting on the stoop.

"Hi," he said with a grin. "I saw you on the tube. You're pretty good, lady."

LN sat down beside him. "You know, I can still hardly believe it. But," she fumbled in her hand bag, "here's the deposit slip. If old Upside Down Face doesn't stop payment, I'll actually get that library."

"Hey, he won't stop payment, baby. He may be tight with his money, but he told the whole world he's giving you the cash. No way he'd back out now. Why, he'd lose too much face."

Thinking of Upside Down Face losing face, they both laughed.

Togo said, "Got a surprise for you, kid."

LN brightened. "Oh, what is it?"

"I'll have to show you inside the house."

LN noticed that he was holding a grocery bag. She opened the door and they both went into her small living room.

"Well, don't be a tease. What is it?"

"I saw those protestors with their 'We Want Elvis' T-shirts and it gave me an idea. Look at this."

He handed her the bag. Somewhat cautiously, as his tone had a hint of mischief in it, she looked inside. Reaching in, she pulled out a T-shirt and unfolded it.

On the front, Togo had stenciled "WE'VE GOT ELVIS!"

She gasped.

"Togo, you maniac! What if someone saw this? Then she started laughing. "You are the damndest man I ever met!"

His eyes softened. "I've been wanting to give you something...something no one else ever had or ever would. And when this is all over, I'd like to see you wear that T-shirt. Just that T-shirt. Just for me."

Color crept up her throat. "Togo, you're moving too fast for me. I know how you feel and I know that Brax and I have drifted apart."

She paused and took a deep breath. "And I like you. You're a warm, funny, lovable man."

His face fell. He said, with resignation and a tinge of sarcasm, "...and you want to be my friend."

"No, damn it! I want to be a good deal more than your friend!"

She took his hand. "It's not easy for most women--for this woman, anyway--to go from one man to another. Just give me a little time."

She paused, "And right now, I'd like a big hug."

He took her in his arms and whispered, "Oh, God. I do love you. I didn't mean to get P.O.'ed there, it's just that I thought you were tossing me out." He touched her hair.

"I know," she said. "When this thing is over, we'll have lots of time."

She freed herself. "And, now Mr. Bridger, I've got to go run a few miles to work off this adrenalin or I'll bust! You go on home, now, hear?"

She lead him to the door, opened it, put a finger on her own lips and transfered the kiss to his, and pushed him into the late afternoon sunlight.

479c

Turning, she walked back into the room and picked up the T-shirt. Humming a few bars of "Take My Body," she walked to a mirror. Holding the T-shirt in front of her breasts, she looked at her reflection and smiled.

Meanwhile, in Axelbank's office, Margaret Jean had taken a call from Hollywood.

"Hi, darling!" an anonymous voice boomed at her over the miles. "You maybe don't know me but I want to make you rich!"

"Me?," she asked, and thought, "Big voice, little man."

"Well, baby doll, not you -- but your boss, that Axelbank guy. Put him on, will you?"

"And who's calling, please," she asked in a cool drawl.

"Solly Gerdus. Solly Gerdus, director and producer. Now put me through, will you, doll?"

"And what's this in reference to, please?" she persisted, enjoying the game.

Solly Gerdus, all 5'3" of him, knew he was beaten. Only an inexperienced, or especially stupid, secretary ever took him seriously enough to put him thru without an explanation of his business. Still, it had been worth a try. So, adopting his Cecile B. deMille-with-unction voice, Solly said, "Miss, ah -- what's your name honey?"

She told him coolly.

"Good," he said, "Good. Now, Miss, what I want to discuss with Mr. Axelbank is so spectacular, so sensational, so ..."

"Yes?," she asked, with no emotion, but smiling to herself.

"Well, here it is, Miss. When you get that coffin back, . . . I mean, when you get Elvis back," he gulped and plunged ahead, "I want to star him in my next movie."

Margaret Jean blurted, "But, good God, the man's dead!"

"Yeah," Solly said, "I know he's dead and all that . . . we wouldn't expect him to move or anything. I see it more as a voice-over thing, you know what I mean?"

Margaret Jean, still stunned, could only stammer, "But-but, this is totally bizarre! It's terrible!"

"Well, how about if we just show him as being, like, in a coma?"

"No," she shouted.

"Listen, sister, this is just about my last shot at the big time; gimme a break, willya? We'll put his name over the title, for Krissake, and all I want is one or two shots over his shoulder, but . . . I mean, in good taste, you know what I mean?"

Margaret Jean took the phone from her ear, looked at it with loathing, and slowly put it in its cradle.

## Chapter Forty Seven

At dusk, outside of the Orpheum, a festive holiday excitement charged the air. The sound-a-like contest was less than two hours away and the aura and trappings of a show business premiere were everywhere.

It was a spectacle of colorful humanity as thousands of loyal Elvis fans, laughing and shouting, crowded the streets in a nostalgic throwback to the vibrant days of the king's reign. CBC had rolled in giant searchlights whose beams criss-crossed the early evening Memphis sky and traditional red velvet covered chains and matching carpet bedecked the theater sidewalk awaiting the VIPs.

The TV network had prepared well despite the limited time. In preliminary rounds held by affiliate stations, the echoes of Presley's voice had reverberated across the country. Systematically, judges had eliminated all entrants but the ten lucky finalists still in the elusive quest for fame and fortune.

CBC, under Wiley's tutelage, had concocted an extravaganza and bathed it in an intoxicating reliving of the past.

The mood of the crowd reflected the combination of sensation and reverence the network had created. Less than <sup>half</sup> would eventually gain entrance to the theater, still, it was the place to be. The contest touched a memory and the crowd reflected this. Packed shoulder to shoulder with their men and children were throngs of women 35 to 38 years old who'd had a crush on Elvis as teenagers. Laugh lines creased their faces now and their hips were wider, but on this night their spirits were young again.

Banners and placards undulated above them. "Thanks Hound Dog" and "Hound Dog We care" were printed on some along with tributes to Elvis. Spontaneously, music broke out in small pockets of strangers and grew to waves of old Elvis songs rolling over the cityscape. Happily, they all accepted the night for what it was, a pilgrimage back to more carefree days.

Weber, with Tibbett beside him, surveyed the scene. "Are our men in place?" he asked.

Tibbett nodded. "They'll be watching for any sign of Hound Dog in and outside of the theater." His eyes scanned the skyline. "We'll check as many of the surrounding buildings as we can."

"I'll be inside with my wife," Weber said. Then rather sheepishly, he added, "she insisted we come."

"I'll let you know immediately of any development," Tibbett assured him. "Where will you be sitting?"

"Sixth row left on the aisle."

Out of the corner of one eye, Sheila Swaine watched Hannah leave her room and step into the elevator. Quickly, the policewoman draped a set of fresh towels over an arm and left the linen closet, her vigil posing as a maid ended. With a house key, she entered the diplomat's room and left the door ajar. She was turning back the bed covers when two barrel chested men appeared, also members of the stake out team.



"The ambassador and her aides have just pulled away from the hotel in a car," one of them informed her.

"Then let's get started," Sheila replied.

The three worked swiftly in silence. A tiny, highly sensitive transistorized microphone was slipped behind the headboard of the bed on the side next to the telephone table. Across the room in the sitting area, another bug was firmly fastened under the couch.

When the furniture had been replaced, one of the men spoke into a walkie talkie. "Envoy to base, come in."

"This is base," a slow, easy voice responded.

"The flowers have been planted," the man said. "They should be blooming." He switched off the walkie talkie and began to talk to the others in a normal voice about the weather. Then, he switched the walkie talkie on again and waited.

Shortly, the slow, easy voice said, "everything is coming up roses."

"Roger. We're leaving the garden."

In one last searching look the room was checked again. The two men stepped into the hall. Sheila paused and returned to place a piece of cellophane wrapped chocolate on the bed pillow in her last ritual as a maid before quietly pulling the door shut.

The last murmur faded and the audience was still. The curtain opened and a spotlight from high above the balcony sent its chalk colored beam to center stage. Out of the shadows, into the lighted ring, stepped Tex Olson, the celebrated Grand Ol Opry singer chosen by CBC as master of ceremonies.

Microphone in hand, his suit a mass of sparkling rhinestones, he walked forward to the footlights followed by the TV cameras sending the show around the world via satellite. "For all of you, I wish Elvis was here," he said dramatically. He paused and heard a collective sigh of remembrance move through the onlookers. "Tonight, we hope to find a new star, however, in his image. A sound-a-like so close no one can tell the difference. Along with him, we have a new song which came to us from Hound Dog. It's titled 'Take My Body.'"

Olson stepped back a few paces. Behind him were The Stings, a well known rock band. Like Elvis, Olson was a versatile performer who'd begun his career as a rock star. As the music began, he wiggled his hips and the audience laughed, then applauded. He knew they were in the palm of his hand as he began to sing:

"Take my body, take my soul, take my body with the rock 'n roll

Take my body, take control, take my body and make it whole...."

When he'd finished the audience sat quietly for an instant then burst into wild clapping and shouting. Women threw kisses toward the stage. The old magic stirred again and there was more to come.

Olson let the applause run its course. When the last handclap had died, he stepped forward again in a gesture of intimacy with the audience. "Well, you seem to like it," he said of the song, a wide smile on his face. Again, the theater resounded with applause.

Olson raised his hand. "There'll be more. Waiting in the wings offstage are our ten finalists in the sound-a-like contest. Now, let's give them a chance." He pointed to the audience. "Remember, you're the judges. Your applause will choose the winner. Now, let's bring out the first sound-a-like." Turning stage right, Olson thrust his arm forward as The Sting struck up "That's All Right Mamma," Elvis' first recording.

When the contestant stood beside the master of ceremonies after walking on stage, the music faded. "Ladies and Gentleman, this is Claude Upton," Olson informed them. "Claude is our finalist from the upper plains. Claude, where is your home?"

"Fargo, North Dakota."

"Claude, I'm going to name three Elvis songs. You're to pick one," Olson turned to the audience. "This is to test his true sound-a-like qualities. Our finalists are not imitators who can mimic one song. They're the real thing. They have voices like Elvis'."

The famous star opened an envelope and looked at Upton. "Ol' buddy, the songs are 'Don't be Cruel,' 'Love Me Tender,' and 'Mystery Train.' Which one do you choose?"

"Love Me Tender," the contestant said without hesitation.

"One of the king's all-time hits," Olson said. "The stage is yours."

The music began and Upton sang very much like Elvis. And so, the contest was underway. For CBC it was another big night. One by one, the finalists appeared. Afterward, the applause was tumultuous. LN and Togo were in the audience again, near the seats they'd had on Tuesday night. Gershon was outside watching the police.

Once, shortly after the performance began, Tibbett slipped down the darkened aisle to Weber's seat and whispered in his ear that Hannah's room had been successfully entered and bugged. Weber nodded and smiled. Hannah, at that moment, sat nearby with the other CBC guests in a special section of the theater. Axelbank was there, Margaret Jean beside him.

Forty five minutes into the program, Olson again moved to the footlights. The audience stirred in anticipation. Olson sensed its mood. "Excited?" he asked and was answered by thunderous applause. "So am I," he shouted, "so let's go to Kyd Jordan."

The newscaster was seated again in the special booth off to one side of the huge stage. "Thanks, Tex," he said and assumed his stern on camera look. "Now it's time for us to talk to Hound Dog, who will tell us the winner of his auction. Will it be Israel or Solidtary, the Polish trade union?" Jordan looked at the frequency hopper leaning upright in a chair next to him. "Hound Dog, are you there?"

A pin dropping could have been heard in the theater as the audience waited. "I'm here," a voice said over the frequency hopper .

"Who, then, is your winner?" asked the anchorman.

"Emotionally, it was a hard choice, Kyd," Hound Dog began from the safety of his hotel room. "I wish I could choose both. When everything else is equal, however, the only fair decision I can make is to give the time, all two minutes, to the highest bidder, which is Israel." Bursts of applause sprinkled the audience. Hound Dog waited, then spoke again. "Solidarity's cause is one of the noblest of mankind and I hope it succeeds. People should be free to pursue their own destiny. I believe time is on the union's side. As for Israel, it can soon speak for itself."

While Hound Dog spoke, the TV camera had first closed in on Gornicki and then Hannah, whose face was radiant. Jordan spoke again. "CBC will air the two minutes won by Israel at Hound Dog's direction," he said without making a direct reference to the fact that Israel had to pay for the time first.

"That is correct," Hound Dog cut in. "At the same time I'll disclose Elvis' whereabouts."

Gasps resounded throughout the audience. Jordan's voice carried over them. "We'll be waiting anxiously to hear from you again then, Hound Dog." Jordan turned his eyes away from the frequency hopper and stared into the camera.

Olson was silent for a moment with his thoughts. Instinctively, members of the audience looked at each other. It was clear, Elvis was on the singer's mind and his voice was low and soft when he finally spoke. "We're ready for the judging," he said. "As I call the finalists back on stage, let's hear your applause."

Again, one by one, the contestants appeared. Each time, the audience responded. The winner was clear, however. He was Too Tall Saunders, a lanky sawmill worker from a little community in Mississippi called Prairie Port, who'd wiggled and squirmed as he sang "Jailhouse Rock."

When the theater was quiet again, Olson said, "I think Elvis would like your choice. Not only can he sing well, he's from the same state." He paused. "It's a nice personal touch." Olson looked at the clock ticking down offstage. "We have just enough time for Too Tall and me to sing," he said, turning to the winner. The Stings played the opening bars of "Take My Body."

Over the music Olson said. "If he's still listening, I wonder if Hound Dog can tell us who the composer of this tune is."

The frequency hopper crackled. "The writer is unknown. All royalties will go to the Presley library to be built at Delta college."

In his seat, Weber cringed as the audience broke into prolonged applause. As Olson and Too Tall sang, the credits rolled on the television screen. The audience began to sway. As the song ended, Olson whispered in Too Tall's ear, then turned to the band. Immediately, the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" filled the theater. "Let's all sing this one for Elvis," Olson called out and the audience did.

Hannah returned to her room promptly after the contest, ready to follow Hound Dog's instructions. She was a mixture of highs and lows, on the one hand exalted by winning and on the other dejected with nothing more to do than wait.

As she slipped out of her clothes into a nightgown, her eyes kept glancing at the frequency hopper on the bedside table and she wondered where Hound Dog was at that moment. A shiver of excitement snaked down her back as she concluded that his primary mission now had to be delivery of the diamonds. She reasoned that until the drop was accomplished, everything else was at a standstill.

She crawled in under the covers. As the sheet warmed, she snuggled a pillow and eased into sleep. Sometime later, a crackle sounded. Groggy at first, half asleep, half aroused, she thought she heard someone in the room asking "Are you there?" but was uncertain as she struggled to come awake.

The crackling became more persistent. Definitely, she heard the quavering words of Hound Dog ask, "are you there?" Suddenly, Hannah had a feeling of unreality. She stared at the frequency hopper, hypnotized by its disembodied voice. For a few seconds it was like listening to a tin creature from outer space.

"Are you there?" Hound Dog repeated. "Come in."

"I'm here," Hannah shouted, fully awake, hoping the volume would compensate for her tardiness.

"Do you have the diamonds?"

"I do."

"Here in Memphis?"

"Yes. What do I do with them?"

"Be ready for my instructions tomorrow."

"Where?"

"Stay in your room until you hear from me again."

"As you say. I'm at your disposal." There was a pause and Hannah quickly asked, "do you really have Elvis? His dentist said on the news your X-rays don't show Elvis' last filling."

Hound Dog laughed. "Don't be misled by that. I'll tell you where he is after I have the diamonds. He's safe. You'll see when you tour Graceland."



"Graceland?" Hannah asked.

Hound Dog seemed to hesitate, as if he'd said more than he should. The frequency hopper crackled in his silence. The pause was long. "They have public tours," he said finally.

"Right now it's closed," she replied.

"Maybe I can arrange something," Hound Dog laughed, seemingly his confident self again. "I'll contact you in the morning."

After Hound Dog signed off, Hannah looked at her watch. It was one-thirty. She kept going over their conversation about Graceland as she fell back to sleep.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Chapter Forty Eight

Weber wrung his hands in delight as he listened to the tape of Hound Dog's conversation with Hammah. His eyes smarted from lack of sleep and outside of his office the first gray color of Friday's dawn spotted the Memphis sky, but he was happy. "We've got the bastard," he said. "He thinks he's going to get those diamonds from the Jewish broad right under my nose. Well, this time I'll be ready."

Tibbett switched off the recorder. "Should I get some men out to Graceland?" he asked.

"Yes, two or three for now to keep an eye on things. I'll call ahead to alert my uncle, Tim. Until I hear differently I'm assuming that Graceland is somehow involved."

"Best to be ready," Tibbett agreed. He looked at Weber. "I'd like some breakfast. How about you?"

"Sleep would be better." Weber eyed the couch across the room. "After I call Tim, I'm going to take a nap. Wake me as soon as Hound Dog calls her back."

Tibbett nodded and left the room carrying the tape to be transcribed by a secretary.

Hannah awoke anxious to hear from Hound Dog. She wished he'd been more precise about the time since the diamonds were beginning to get on her nerves. She showered and ordered breakfast in her room, both with an ear always cocked toward the frequency hopper. Several times she thought she'd heard faint crackles but no voice followed.

She'd begun to eat and was buttering a sweet roll when the words finally resonated through the room. "Good morning, Miss Tesslar, this is Hound Dog."

"I'm here," she replied.

"Then listen carefully. The diamonds are to be delivered tonight and you'll need a car for a trip of about six miles. Head east from the downtown area to U.S. 51 and go south until you hear from me. Leave your hotel at nine o'clock. You'll do some walking, so dress accordingly."

Hannah wrote the instruction down, then read them back to him.

"Until tonight," said Hound Dog.

The frequency hopper went dead and Hannah summoned her aides.

Tibbett shook Weber's shoulder. The Shelby county attorney general slowly opened his eyes and sat up. "Hound Dog has contacted Miss Tesslar again. The tape is here," Tibbett told him. Weber rose and sent for coffee. The two men listened together.

"There's no doubt about it now," Weber said, elated. "He's directing her to Graceland." He walked to his desk, followed by Tibbett. "Begin moving more men into Graceland," he instructed his deputy. "I've made arrangements with my uncle to set up a command post inside the mansion. I want everyone on the estate and out of sight by three o'clock. And move them in as normally as possible. Pose as workmen. Also, send Lobo and Burns to Fort Chaffee for several infrared snooperscoopes. They may not get back in time, but I want to make the effort."

"It'll be touch and go for them," Tibbett put in. "The fort in all the way across Arkansas." He turned and left for his own office. Weber pressed a button on his intercom. "Libby," he said to his secretary, "run down Kyd Jordan. I want to talk to him."

"Yes, sir," she replied and within minutes the newscaster was on the line.

"Kyd, I've a story for you if you're interested."

"I'm always interested in a story. Seems that just the other day you accused me of being willing to sell my grandmother to get one."

Weber laughed nervously. "Well, this time you won't need to go to that extreme. I'm laying a trap for Hound Dog. Do you want to stake it out with cameras?"

"Do I ever. Elvis returned and Hound Dog unmasked. What a climax!"

"Meet me in my office at two o'clock and be prepared to be out of communication with everyone until late tonight."

"I'll miss my nightly newscast."

"Make a choice. We have to be in place by three o'clock. I don't want to take any chances on Hound Dog seeing us."

Jordan paused momentarily before replying. "I'll see you at two. This story is too big to miss."

For the next several hours, Weber's men moved at intervals onto the grounds at Graceland. One group arrived as a crew of tree surgeons, another as painters. About one-thirty some appeared as carpenters. Weber and Kyd Jordan pulled up to a side gate a few minutes before three. TV mini-cameras had preceded them in a plumbing truck.

Weber made a last check on the status of the snooperscoopes and learned, to his disappointment, that his men had motor trouble with their helicopter. He stuck to his decision to go without them and ordered the estate sealed off.

It was nine o'clock at last. Hannah, flanked by her aides, walked through the ornate lobby of the Peabody hotel into the night, where a car waited. She clutched the straps of a tan leather tote bag tightly in one hand. Inside of it were the diamonds and her frequency hopper.

The street was almost deserted, a stark contrast to the noise and crowds of the Cotton Carnival ball six nights earlier. The car hop was tipped and dismissed. Hannah settled into the back seat. Simon Ochs slipped in under the steering wheel; David Bass took the passenger seat beside him, spread a map out in his lap and took a flashlight to read it from his coat pocket.

As the car pulled away, Hannah leaned forward and took the frequency hopper from the tote bag on the floor beside her feet. Her whole body pulsed with excitement. Up front the men were silent. The car turned eastward and picked up speed. First one car, then a second, left the curb as the Israelis passed and fell in line behind them. Hannah's driver caught the headlights in his rear view mirror.

"We've company," he said matter-of-factly.

"Hannah drew a short breath and switched on her frequency hopper.

"Is that you, Hound Dog?" she asked.

Silence.

A dryness tightened her throat. She swallowed, wanting to look around, but she kept her eyes straight ahead and waited. Convinced there would be no answer, she switched off the frequency hopper.

"It must be the authorities," she said.

"Shall I try to lose them?" Ochs inquired.

"No. Continue on the route prescribed."

The car moved into the intersection of Union avenue and Camilla street and turned south. "U. S. 51 is just ahead," Bass said, studying his map. The car slowed. Hannah switched on her frequency hopper again and leaned it against the seat cushion. She would wait for Hound Dog to contact her. Ochs watched in the rear view mirror as the two cars behind him followed.

At Mclemore avenue, the light changed to red just as the Israelis cleared the intersection. The two cars behind them ran it. Ochs shrugged and continued on south. They'd been on the road twenty minutes when Hannah heard a faint sound of static rattle the frequency hopper. She perked up with the stimulating realization that she'd been listening for the reassurance of a familiar voice to tell her what to do next. She waited expectantly, her eyes glued to the frequency hopper.

Crisp and clear, the words came. "This is Hound Dog. What is your location?"

"We're moving south in U.S. 51," Hannah answered. "We've just passed Norris road."

"Keep driving."

"That's all?"

"I'll keep you informed as needed."

"We're being followed. I'm sure it isn't you."

"Well, that's interesting," Hound Dog replied, drawing out his words.

"It must be Van Weber."

"All we can see are the headlights of two cars."

"~~Hmmmmmm~~." There was a deep sigh. "This could be touchy."

"Should we turn back?"

" No."

Hannah's frequency hopper went dead.

Southgate stood at the windows of the upstairs back bedroom he'd picked as his command post in the Trimble's house. Suddenly, his world had shrunk to an area no bigger than several square miles. He was sure Weber was tailing Hannah. Downstairs, LN waited with Elvie. Gershon and Togo were already working in the tunnel.

The night was pitch black. Far away, down the street, a dog barked. Southgate's mind churned and under his jacket the sweat ran down his back. He considered the odds of being trapped and looked at his luminous watch dial. He had three minutes to decide whether to abandon the drop or go ahead. He could hear his heart beat in the stillness. So far, he'd outfoxed Weber at every turn. This time, there were no carnival crowds, however, for diversion. He stood staring at something an infinite distance away, alone in his decision. Then, he put his field glasses to his eyes and looked into the meadow behind Graceland, peaceful and empty. He would go ahead.

The frequency hopper next to Hannah crackled again.



"Are you still there?" Hound Dog asked.

"Still here and still being followed," Hannah replied.

"How far back are your friends?"

"Several hundred feet."

"Listen carefully then because this isn't going to be easy."

"I will."

"Very shortly on your left you'll come to the Graceland Christian church. Pull into it's parking lot, kill your lights, and wait. Those cars behind you should go on by."

"I hope so. They've sure been dogged."

Deep in the tunnel, Togo removed his safety glasses and surgical mask and unplugged the laser from its power supply. With Gershon's help, he refastened the handles to the square of cement he'd just recut in the vault. The lights were switched off. Together, they lifted the block out and rested it against the wall.

There was a rush of cool air through the chamber. Gershon and Togo crawled inside the vault. Overhead, only fourth-fifths of the grave was covered. Its bronze and marble slab had been left askew after Weber's aides examined the inside of the vault. Through the opening, which was at the far end, the men saw the stars.

They listened for perhaps a minute, then Gershon boosted Togo to look out. Slowly, his head swept full circle. Darkness surrounded him except for a lone light in the guard house fifty feet across the driveway.

Weber's eyes were riveted to the meadow as he stood at his command post on the second floor of the mansion, his uncle, Tim, beside him. The Walkie Talkie in his hand informed him that Hannah's car had just made a sharp turn into the Graceland Christian church parking lot.

"We'll pick them up from here," Weber said. "You keep driving south. Don't pull in. Let them think they've lost you."

"Roger."

"Units on the north be alert," Weber ordered. "Get the ambassador's car under surveillance and watch for her on foot."

A team of men in black fatigues, their faces smudged with lampblack, spread out along the edge of the estate where it was separated from the churchyard by fencing and undergrowth. They moved stealthily, as if tracking game.

Hannah looked anxiously out of her car windows waiting further instructions. Her frequency hopper popped and hissed. Hound Dog, his words clipped, said, "leave the car alone with the diamonds. Move along the fence toward the rear of the estate. When you see the meadow behind the mansion stop and wait."

Hannah bent over and took the diamonds from the tote bag. Without another word, the small suede bag with the gems clutched in her hand, she opened the door and slipped out. She waited for a moment and listened. Pangs of fear gripped her. She walked slowly forward, silence all around her. She'd just begun to feel a new sense of reassurance when she stumbled over an exposed tree root. She stopped, breathing heavily and leaned against the fence. Gradually, she regained her wind. Hurriedly, she snatched a small penlight from her coat pocket. With its beam moving along the ground, she continued on until the meadow opened in front of her. She switched off the light and waited again in the darkness, her eyes and ears **alert** to every movement and sound.

Looking through the field glasses, Southgate saw the light in the instant before it went out. He walked to the head of the stairs and called softly to LN. "It's time. She's reached the meadow." LN picked up Elvie and carried him to the basement. She dropped him to the floor at the tunnel entrance and he scampered inside, LN behind him.

In the mansion, Weber also saw the light. At once, a voice on the Walkie Talkie informed him that Hannah had stopped and was looking into the meadow. "Let her proceed," Weber instructed. "We don't want her, we want Hound Dog."

Hannah, her heart pumping, tighten her grip on the suede bag of diamonds. A whiff of wind grazed her cheeks. Then she heard Hound Dog's voice again, this time low, almost a whisper. "Climb the fence and walk on an angle toward the back of the meadow. You'll approach a small clump of trees. On the front edge, there's a stump. Place the suede bag on top and leave."

Hannah, thankful for the slacks and flat shoes she wore, clambered over the fence and dropped down onto the dew covered grass of the clearing. Cautiously, in the dark, she walked forward, the trees and buildings surrounding the meadow silhouetted against the sky. Several times she stopped and listened, took her bearings and stepped out again. The amount of open field in front of her diminished until there was no more. At the tree line, she searched for the stump. When she saw it, she hesitated for only an instant, then placed the suede bag on top, spun around and retraced her steps. She felt her feet grow heavier and she wanted to break into a run. Only once, she looked back.

LN lifted Elvie into her arms again and half crawled into the grave, where Gershon lifted her up until her waist was through the opening. She gave Elvie a hug and lowered him to the ground. His white left ear and four white paws had been covered with black shoe polish.

"Go," she commanded. "Go bring back the bag."

The dog rushed away into the darkness. A half minute later, he reached the stump and picked up the suede bag, with the diamonds, between his teeth. He turned and started back to LN.

At the edge of the meadow, beyond the copse, one of Weber's men heard the noise. He turned, calling to others, and ran toward the stump, where a short time before he'd seen Hannah leave the bag. Briefly, he thought he saw a small black form disappearing across the meadow. He radioed Weber.

"Turn on the floodlights," Weber shouted. "Turn on the floodlights. They've spotted something." Instantly, just as Hannah reached the fence, the meadow was awash with white light. She scrambled over, then turned to watch. Men were everywhere, running back and forth like ants on a burning log. They probed the empty stump.

Far ahead of them, Elvie ran into LN outstretched arms, the bag still between his teeth. Quickly she picked him up and dropped back into the grave out of sight. She took the bag from between his teeth and hurried into the chamber. Gershon and Togo fit the block back into place and braced it with two by fours.

Hannah started for her car, her path illuminated by the floodlights.

"You," a harsh voice shouted. "Stop where you are."

Hannah halted, thinking the tone of authority in any language sounded the same. A squad of men ran up and surrounded her. One of them stepped forward. "I'm Van Weber, the Shelby county attorney general. Have you just rendezvoused with Hound Dog?"

"No," she answered honestly.

"Did you leave him a payment?"

Hannah hesitated.

"I thought so," Weber said without waiting for her reply.

One of the searchers ran up. "She left a package on a stump over there," he said pointing across the meadow. "We find nothing, however. I thought I saw a dog." He pointed toward the mansion. "It ran off that way."

By now, Kyd Jordan had his camera crew at the fence. Weber saw it and smiled at Hannah. "You gave us quite a chase," he said pleasantly.

"It was rather bizarre," she replied. "But I had to follow Hound Dog's instructions. "

"I would have appreciated your cooperation," Weber continued.

"I'm sorry. This wasn't illegal, however. The payment is for the air time we bought at his auction."

Weber sighed, aware of her diplomatic immunity. He watched her return to her car and drive away. Intuitively, he knew that his last chance to capture Hound Dog had slipped through his fingers.

As he walked back toward the mansion, Uncle Tim, at his side, asked, "does this mean you won't be going to Nashville as governor, that I won't be chief of the state police?"

Weber gave his relative a cold stare. "Just shut up, Uncle Tim, just shut up."

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Forty Nine

It was well past midnight when the four conspirators gathered around the Trimble's kitchen table to divide the diamonds. Southgate opened the suede bag and removed a chamois pouch. He carefully poured the sparkling gems onto the white table cloth, then meted out to each his share.

The Trimble's homecoming from Hawaii was only hours away. LN had arranged for a limousine service to pick her up around eight-fifteen for the ride to the airport, where the Trimble's were due to land an hour later. Everyone knew that their work was cut out for them, that it was a race with time now to finish.

As Southgate completed counting out the gems, however, LN suggested that they ought to do something for Margaret Jean since she'd played such important roles in getting the X-rays and influencing Axelbank's donation to the library.

"How about a diamond studded garter," Gershon offered. "We could each pitch in a stone."

They all roared with laughter.

"A wrist watch set in diamonds would be more practical and appreciated," LN said, serious again.



"Anyone object to a watch?" Southgate asked. No one did. He turned to LN. "Before we go to work again, there's one more ceremony we should have," he said, placing a box wrapped in red ribbon in front of her. Inside, LN found the money she has loaned the group to start its operation.

Quickly, after that, they donned work clothes. The men carried several hundred pounds of ice into the basement from the van, which had been used to pick it up from the icehouse an hour earlier. Then, they descended into the tunnel, more-than-ever a musty, dank, sultry hole that brought them to a sweat fast. The men grunted as they dragged along the ice. LN carried the flashlight and reached the chamber first. Gershon maneuvered the first block of ice close the vault, then, he and LN aided the others.

Togo wiped his brow. "I'm glad that's done," he said, catching his breath.

Southgate turned on the laser and cut the ice into smaller pieces. Working by flashlight, the men removed the two by fours propped against the vault and, for the second time within a few hours, removed the concrete block. Gershon and Togo entered the grave and peered out of the opening overhead.

"Everything is quiet," they reported back. "Weber and the others have cleared out."

The conspirators spread the ice over the vault floor and pulled the coffin over in front of the grave with the winch. With two of them on each side, they slowly slid the casket, topped by a spray of roses, back into the grave over the ice.

They stood gazing into the shadowy tomb, their breath coming in short spurts.

"Do we have time to rest for a few minutes," LN asked.

"Southgate played a flashlight beam on his watch. It was three o'clock. "I think so," he said.

All four of them sat down in a line against the wall. Five minutes later Southgate was on his feet. "Now to seal the vault," he said.

"Let's get as much ice and water out as we can first," Togo suggested. "We can move around easier then."

Togo and LN rose to join Southgate. Gershon didn't budge.

"I've been thinking about that opening," he said. "Let's touch up the inside of the block with my homemade mold after its back is in place, then climb out through the hole. That would be a real gasser."

"God, that would be a nice touch," Southgate replied. "Weber would never figure it out." He paused and stroked his chin. "But it would be dangerous. Once the block is glued back in place you're trapped inside Graceland. There'd be no escape through the tunnel."

Gershon nodded. "I considered that. But if Togo's game, I'd still like to do it."

"Why not?" Togo asked.

The epoxy had already been colored by Gershon to match the concrete as closely as possible. He rose and took the lid off of the bucket and began to brush the glue onto the edges of the concrete block. He worked quickly. When three sides were done, Southgate and Togo balanced the block on one of the wooden boxes and Gershon swished his brush along the bottom edge.

He grabbed a bucket of his mold and placed it inside the vault. Then the three men moved the block up next to the opening. Gershon and Togo crawled into the vault and from there helped Southgate and LN guide the block back into place.

Inside the chamber, LN switched the floodlight back on and she and Southgate pressed the block tightly against the beveled edge. They removed the handles and then filled in the holes with more epoxy. Next they began to remove the equipment.

While this was going on, Togo was inside the vault patiently holding the beam of a small flashlight on the block for Gershon. He held his free hand over the top of the lens to stop the diffusion of the light upward and out through the opening atop the grave. With the touch of an artist, Gershon spread his mold solution over the concrete and into the hairline cracks left from the cuts.

"It's not Rembrandt," he whispered to Togo. "But, in its way, it's a masterpiece."

"Agreed," Togo replied emphatically. "To us it's the most important work of art in the world,"

"I'd put its worth at just short of four and a quarter million dollars," Gershon said with a chuckle.

Gershon worked in silence after that. He gave a dab here and a dab there until he was completely satisfied. Then, after one last close inspection, he turned and faced Togo.

"Let's get out of here," he said.

Gershon gave Togo a boost through the opening. With his hands once on the turf, Togo hauled himself the rest of the way. He immediately flattened out on his stomach and reached down in the grave to first pull up Gershon's pail of unused mold and then help Gershon get out far enough to lift himself up the same way Togo had.

They crouched on their haunches and looked at the guardhouse. There was only one man in it now. They watched as he put a cup to his lips and took a drink of what they guessed was coffee. Togo tapped Gershon on the shoulder and pointed toward the Greek columns and the wall beyond with the stained glass windows.

In the next instant, he was up and walking slowly straight at them. Gershon quickly followed. Once around the wall, they moved swiftly towards the fence and over it into Trimble's yard. The job was done and they were safe.

Togo rested against the boards. The Trimble's house was pitch black. He wondered what time it was. He felt cold air against his cheeks and guessed it was near dawn. With Gershon beside him, he headed towards the basement door, which they found unlocked.

Inside, Southgate and LN were busy piling equipment near the stairwell. LN stopped when she saw Togo and hugged him.

"Mission accomplished," Gershon reported.

"What time is it?" Togo asked.

"A little after five-thirty," replied Southgate. "Can you unhook the power lines?"

"What's left in the tunnel?" Togo asked.

Southgate took a mental inventory. "The winch, the motor for the laser, the floodlight. LN and I brought out mostly small stuff."

"Let's clear out everything we want before I cut off the power," Togo suggested. "We can use the floodlight. It's much easier to see by than flashlights."

A weary Southgate agreed.

Dawn came while they were removing the winch, an operation that took longer than anticipated. By the time they finished the sun was up. LN went upstairs to pack and dress to go to the airport. In the basement the three exhausted men dragged out the motor and finally the floodlight from the tunnel.

Upstairs the doorbell rang. Southgate looked at his watch. Eight-ten. It must be the limousine driver. Southgate went to the top of the stairs and called softly to LN.

"You'd better telephone us before you leave the airport," he told her. "This is going to go right down to the wire."

LN agreed. When the front door closed behind her, he returned to the basement. Togo was in the laundry room and for the next half hour undid the wiring he'd tapped into the fusebox a month earlier. He and Gershon rolled up the wire as far as the tunnel entrance. Togo suggested to Southgate that they leave the rest.

"It would save time," he said.

While Togo pulled out the wiring, Gershon and Southgate loaded the equipment into the van. That brought them down to the final chore--blocking up the basement wall and replacing the wood paneling. Southgate looked at his watch again. It was almost nine o'clock.

Gershon ripped out the wooden framework at the entrance to the tunnel while Togo prepared the pre-mixed cement. Southgate piled the cinderblocks next to the opening. Within minutes, Togo was slapping the mortar between the blocks and closing the passageway. In a short time the new wall was waist high.

Southgate raced up to the kitchen to await LN's call. When the phone rang minutes later, the tunnel had just been closed.

"The Trimble's are anxious to get home," Southgate heard LN say. "We're waiting for their luggage. But I don't think I can stall them without raising their suspicions."

"Jesus," Southgate exclaimed. "We need a half hour. You've got to give us that. Present them with the money for your household expenses."

"All right," LN replied. "It's nine-thirty. I promise I won't get them there before ten."

"Check," Southgate said and hung up.

He hurried back down to the basement, "We've got thirty minutes," he said. "That's all."

"We'll make it," Togo said.

"We have to be out of here in thirty minutes," Southgate repeated. "Not just finishing up."

Gershon sawed the two by fours needed to rebuild the studs behind the paneling. Together, he and Togo pounded them into place. Southgate stood nearby holding the paneling. He looked at his watch. Nine-forty six. Gershon drove home the last nail needed to secure the frame. Togo grabbed the other side of Southgate's panel and together they guided it into place.

Gershon was ready with the finishing nails. Carefully, he pounded them in around the panel edges and finally countersank them with a nail punch. It seemed an eternity to all of them before he finished. The time was nine fifty-four.

For a few brief seconds they stepped back to examine their work. Everyone was satisfied. They snatched up the tools and few remaining scraps of wood and ran up the stairs, two at a time. Gershon started the van while Southgate opened the garage door. Togo tossed the tools and scraps into the back of the van and climbed in.

Gershon pulled out and stopped in the driveway. The garage door went down one second and the next Southgate was beside Gershon and Togo in the front seat.

The van coasted down the incline and turned right into Dolan drive. Just as it neared the corner with U.S. 51 a black limousine turned the corner. Inside, LN and the Trimblees were seen in animated conversation. The van rolled on unnoticed.

Gershon wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his shirt sleeve and said fervently, "I'll never set foot in a basement again."

Hannah stood in front of the Music Gate at Graceland, a warm spring wind gently ruffling her hair as a CBC technician fastened a small microphone to her white blouse. The Saturday afternoon sun played on her face. Around her, the sidewalk was crowded with fans held back from the broadcast area by police-attended ropes.



Clay Granger, his headset in place, checked the time and signaled to Kyd Jordan. He walked over to Hannah "Jordan will introduce you," he said. "When I point to you, you're on." Hannah nodded, then gave a quick, upbeat wave to four people clustered just inside the ropes near the cameras. They were Southgate, LN, Togo and Gershon, who she'd asked as her special guests.

Soon, she heard Jordan's voice saying, "This is a special CBC news report." As the famed newscaster described the scene and recalled the drama of the auction, she watched Granger. When he signaled her, she looked straight into the cameras and said:

"Two hours ago, after this envelope in my hand was delivered, Hound Dog directed me by his frequency hopper to return here to Elvis' home. His purpose, he said, was two fold. One, for me to utilize the two minutes my country purchased and, secondly, to disclose the whereabouts of Elvis.

"Three nights ago on the stage of the Orpheum theater here in Memphis, Mehdi Majali of the Palestine Liberation Organization pleaded for a Palestinian state and said 'we have the same right to a native land as others.' This is a natural desire which Israelis understand and wonder why many Arab leaders don't recognize Israelis right to exist also. We, too, say that we have the same right to a native land as others.

"So, we both plead for the same end. But centuries of warfare have obscured these identical desires and long ago it became easier to hate. Our God told Moses '...thou shalt give life for life, tooth for tooth, eye for eye, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning.' Progressively, as weapons become more destructive, this becomes less practical.

"Today, my government asks me to suggest that the philosophy of an eye for an eye be put behind us by both sides. It's time to terminate long standing policies of stalemate and cooperate for a peace which is as essential for the rest of the world as for Arabs and Jews. Israel is willing. We hope a charitable world will help us. Thank you."

After a momentary pause, Hannah tore open the envelope and unfolded a typewritten note. Scanning it quickly, she then read aloud, "On the hill behind you the king is back in his tomb."

As the cameras followed them, Hannah and Jordan hurried up the drive to the grave. Peering inside they saw the coffin covered by the spray of roses. A note attached to the flowers read: "We love you Elvis. Hound Dog and friends. TCB."

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*

## Epilogue

A story can be taken only so far, of course. So, one doesn't know if everyone lived happily ever after. The conspirators were certainly ecstatic that last Saturday morning in Memphis once their caper was successfully over and they continue to be good friends. Despite their new wealth, all four are still at Delta college. They seem more relieved with the security they have now than anything else.

As you probably suspect, Togo and LN were married and the relationship between Margaret Jean and Axelbank continues to mellow. Hannah and Southgate are still trying to get together. After all of his orneriness and balking about the library, Axelbank is better off than ever. He's looked upon as a hero by Elvis fan clubs and his empire continues to grow.

Needless to say, Weber didn't run for governor. He realized his image was tarnished badly by the ineptness of his investigation of Hound Dog. Although everyone else has returned to normal living, he continues to pursue his pet theory that a transfer of coffins took place. He's checked out the buyer of every copper casket around the time Elvis' body was moved to Graceland. Carrie Westfall had died later, of course, and there was the matter of her cremation on record.

Gleazer Westfall, by the way, shows unrestrained joy everytime he walks by the Alan Axelbank Library for Elvis Presley Studies. If he suspects any shenanigans with his late wife's body he doesn't voice them.

So, life goes on. Just the other day we heard a radio broadcast that we suspect may be related to our conspirators. After all, Elvis helped them out immeasurably. We took the trouble to pick up the transcript from station WKTU:

HI, THIS IS YOUR AROUND-THE-TOWN REPORTER, VINCE MANGELLO.

SOMETHING MIGHTY CURIOUS IS GOING ON OUT NEAR GRACELAND IN THIS CITY. SOMEONE, AND NO ONE WILL SAY WHO THAT SOMEONE IS, HAS BOUGHT THE SHOPPING CENTER ACROSS FROM THE MANSION OF THE LATE ELVIS PRESLEY.

TWO STORES IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PLAZA HAVE BEEN RAZED. SEVERAL DOZEN WORKMEN SWARM OVER THE SITE. THEY ARE BUILDING, ON SEPARATE FOUNDATIONS ABOUT ONE HUNDRED FEET APART, WHAT LOOKS LIKE TWO HUGE SHOES. EACH "SHOE" IS NEARLY SEVEN FEET LONG. SHOES THAT SIZE WOULD FIT A PERSON AN INCREDIBLE FOUR HUNDRED FEET HIGH.

WHAT CAN IT MEAN? A STATUE? THE FOREMAN ON THE JOB REFUSED TO SHOW US HIS BLUEPRINTS AND SAYS HE HAS NO COMMENT.

SEE YOU TOMORROW - - - AROUND THE TOWN.

Someone, it seems, is still taking care of business.

\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*  
\*\*\*\* \*